

THE
ROAD TO SHANGHAI

White Slave Traffic in Asia

By
HENRY CHAMPLY

Translated from the French by
WARRE B. WELLS

11th Thousand

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JOHN



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A FAREWELL—AND A PRELUDE

“COME and have a drink with us, pretty one,” he said, “and I’ll stay.”

If he had only stayed a little longer in Mukden! Then he would have missed the *Philippa*.

It was there, in a Russian dance-hall, that I saw Albert Londres for the last time. The date was the first day of the third moon of the Chinese year of the Tiger. Or, if you prefer it, the 6th of April, 1932. I might even say the 7th, for it was two o’clock in the morning.

On the 16th of May, that famous comrade of mine was to be lost in the Red Sea—that really Red Sea—when his ship was destroyed by fire.

That disaster left me mourning several dear friends. I have read the reports of it so often that I can almost believe I was an eye-witness myself.

Here was the “Lion’s Head” rock of Cape Guardafui. I have rounded it myself twice by day and once by night. And here was the white ship with her square smokestacks, that marvel of our shipbuilding-yards. I had admired her at Yokohama, and been sorry that I was not sailing in her.

Through the stifling night off the Somali coast she glided over the dark water, lit with phosphorescence. The decks were deserted. In the cabins the electric fans whirled. The slight throbbing of the engines lulled the homeward-bound Colonials.

“To-morrow,” they said to themselves as they went to sleep, “we shall be so much nearer France.”

All at once, an overheated piece of woodwork crackled into flames. A trifling accident; but it turned the whole ship into a furnace. Women and children started shrieking. They were to shriek for hours. Forthwith it was chaos that the heroic ships’ officers had to control.

Here was Albert Londres, awakened in his cabin. I can still see that full, pale-complexioned face of his. He had a little fair beard, very carefully trimmed. His sparse hair formed a nimbus, like something airy, around his head.

By nature his blue eyes were restless and sombre. But that pale face of his betrayed little emotion. Since the war he had lived in the midst of other perils. The fire on board the *Philippa* would simply mean material for another article.

Still, he felt the finger of Fate. He lost his presence of mind. Before himself, he wanted to save his treasured manuscript: the investigation on which he was working. He did not open his door in time. It was sealed by fire. Then, prisoner in a burning cell, he hoisted himself up to the port-hole.

“Jump into the water!” somebody shouted to him from the upper deck.

But Londres thought about the sharks.

“No,” he shouted back. “Throw me a rope!”

Somebody threw him a hose-pipe. He put his whole weight on to it.

A ghastly miscalculation. The hose-pipe was not secured. The slack of it slid, and Londres fell backwards.

Eight yards below was the warm, dark water. It closed over him. Happily, the shock must have made his struggles subconscious, before monstrous jaws gaped wide for him.

Up above, one of the men who had seen him leant over the rail.

“Hell, it was loose! Oh, poor chap! . . .” Then he, too, thought about saving himself. You cannot eternalise over a mistake when everything around you is in flames.

At the “Café Mukden,” on April 7th, as a matter of fact, I found “Michka” Londres brooding and melancholy: less alive than he used to be at the time of our meetings on the *Quotidien* and the *Petit Journal*. The sometime lean poet had grown heavy with success, like an Italian captain of the Renaissance. But, above all, the night of that last fling—only five weeks before his death—who knows what foreboding obsessed him?

The “Café Mukden” is a haunt such as the Russian refugees have scattered all over the world.

Outside was the churlish spring of Manchuria. Melting ice on the buildings of the new town and the hovels of the Chinese city. Swarms of tatterdemalions; Japanese patrols; fever and fear. Not far away roved bandits ready to cut off your ears. Further away seethed Harbin: White Russia in liquidation, and Vladivostok: Red Russia in germination.

I had got up the day before at dawn. I had interviewed a Japanese general and some Manchurian rebels, and then I had wandered about a suburb which was not in the least like Asnières. Having dined very ceremoniously among the *geisha*, I had come here to meet a party of Europeans.

Two floors of light, warmth, and music. At the tables, Americans, Swedes, Bulgarians, and Yellow men from every part of Asia. You listened to snatches of international jazz: “Good night, sweetheart.” “Boy, three Manhattans!” The cocktails, too, were just the same as anywhere else.

Still, in the middle of every wall hung a nice notice, worded in Chinese, in Russian, and in English: “No chits.” In other words, “No credit given.” Besides, there were the “taxi-girls.”

“Consul,” asked Londres, “would you mind our inviting that Siberian Lola-Lola to have a drink with us?”

The French Consul at Mukden, M. Crépin, agreed readily enough. He has the ways and the smile of the Robert de Flers we used to know; and he is a true diplomat.

Mr. Barbara, another good companion, translated the invitation to the pretty girl; for she could speak nothing as yet but her own Siberian dialect. She deigned to come and sit with us, and she drank coloured water. It was only after the dance-hall was closed that she got drunk, in the company of her male compatriots of the orchestra.

She was all pink and white, poured into a simple black dress. Tall, slim, and very young. The face of an angel, or a film star: the most divine flower of the snows.

“They’d admire her even at Hollywood,” somebody declared.

“The dancing partners here are all delightful,” added somebody else; “but she’s really in a class by herself.”

“Which doesn’t alter the fact,” remarked Londres pityingly, “that her worldly wealth doubtless consists in a handful of clothes in the attic of a Manchurian inn. And if the ugliest Chinese merchant in Mukden wants her, for the sake of his dollars . . .”

“You met a girl like that before, who had resigned herself to charming the Yellow men,” I reminded my senior as a reporter. “In 1923, when you wrote *China Gone Mad*.”

Londres smiled, touched by the memory.

“At that time,” he said, “I had met only one. To-day Harbin exports its Siberian girls by the dozen. And in Peking, along the Yangtse, in Canton, everywhere in China you get competitors too, coming from Australia, from America, and from Europe. The Chinese don’t have to drive these White women to it any more. They come of their own accord. So the Chinese can do themselves proud.”

"And it isn't only the Asiatics," I replied.

"To-day the South Sea Islanders, the Africans, the American negroes, in fact *the Coloured peoples all over the world* have become convinced that the White woman is the most beautiful, the most voluptuous—in short, that she is superior to all others. They prefer her, they desire her—and they beckon to her. . . ."

"And she comes," Londres cut in. "Haven't you noticed that yourself?"

"In my eyes," I returned, "this result of travel, of fashion, of the cinema, of all our propaganda for the glorification of White women is, and will continue to be, *the most important new departure of our time.*"

Londres nodded, with that ironical indifference of his.

"Perhaps," he murmured. "In any case, Asia is the main market. And I know very well what its centre of attraction is. Ask this girl where she dreams about going. . . ."

Mr. Barbara transmitted the question.

"To Shanghai!" cried the pretty Russian girl, all enthusiasm.

"Shanghai," repeated "Michka," satisfied but thoughtful. "Really, it's just like the Biblical Babylon. The spells of money are woven there all the time: banking, banco, speculation, smuggling, war. And then, to put the profits back into circulation, there's this essential traffic—the traffic in women."

"To follow up your *Road to Buenos Aires*, you ought to write *The Road to Shanghai*," somebody suggested. (I believe it was our distinguished Consul.)

Londres shuddered. Looking back, I recall his expression of real pain.

"I could tell some tales out of school," he said, mimicking a street Arab's accent.

"Yes, write a book about it," I exclaimed. "You could make a fine work of it—a work both of human interest and of French interest."

"One-third of Shanghai is French, after all," Londres agreed. "It's a flaunting, fearsome place. And, among us, people know next to nothing about it."

"You would be helping the efforts of our administration," I went on, "to prevent the motto of the French Settlement from becoming: 'One Frenchman less, one Frenchwoman more.'"

Londres burst out laughing.

"Yes, indeed, those great world-teachers of virtue, the Anglo-Saxons of every sect, have taught the little Chinese coolies that French women—Parisian women—are the most debauched women on earth. So now the most minor Mandarin demands one of these Super-White women from his *comprador*. The purveyor puts the order through, in the normal course of business, to Marseilles, or Paris. . . ."

He winked.

"And there, let me tell our friends the Puritans, the feminine gender is much more respectable than you may think. Still, there's the lure of adventure, together with hard times. . . ."

His face hardened suddenly.

"And after all," he growled, "all the daughters of Eve are mad, except just *one*. . . ."

That last phrase of his breathed all his own heart, paternal, infinitely tender. Then he went on to prophesy.

"*The Road to Shanghai?* Yes, that's the new route of prostitution which is going to replace the old one. China is more lustful than South America. And she's barely begun to tap her wealth, whereas Argentina and Chile are in debt, hard up. . . ."

Then he bent over, in an odd kind of way. He spoke so low that we could barely catch the words he said so painfully.

"But *I'll never write it*. No, I've got other plans. . . ."

A moment later, he stood up.

"I'm going back to the hotel. I've got to start for Tientsin to-morrow," he said—with one last glance at the ravishing Siberian.

His fate was sealed.

"No woman," Albert Londres was in the habit of saying, "exercises the same devilish attraction for me as just a simple, rectangular little railway ticket."

We left the "Café Mukden" together. The air outside was icy, but bracing. Shouting like bandits, a dozen rickshaw-runners rushed up into the lamplight. Were they among those who had evil thoughts about our Parisian women?

For the last time I shook hands with Albert Londres. His hand was already a little limp.

"It seems to interest you," he said to me, in a friendly, rather mysterious way. "So do it yourself."

"What?"

"*The Road to Shanghai.*"

"But it's a book for you! It's just your subject."

He shook his head, by way of saying: "No."

"No thanks, for me either," I said with a laugh. "Some of our charitable colleagues in Paris would be only too glad of the chance to say that I was decrying your *Road to Buenos Aires.*"

"And what if they do?" he replied, with all the loftiness of the true traveller. "*It's you who are going to write it.*"

Those were his last words to me.

So now it is a legacy. As such I accept it.

Under this title, given to it by a traveller who will return no more, *The Road to Shanghai* will form one phase, one chapter, one subject, in the wider study of "White Women" to which I proposed to devote myself long before that night of ours in Mukden.

En route, then, for Shanghai, *city of France*, where so many Frenchwomen go astray.

PART I

Is There a Road?

CHAPTER I

ONE WAYFARER: BUT DOES SHE MEAN A ROAD?

“YOU come from there yourself, eh? From Shanghai, really?” asked the red-haired girl beside me.

“*Zoui, zoui, Med’micelle*, Shanghai,” lisped the Chinaman, in his pastel blue jacket. “You like dance, yes?”

We found ourselves in one night-haunt just now. Here we are in another one, in Paris, a year earlier. Don’t let a little thing like that surprise you.

It was at a time when the wanderlust was tormenting me. I was to set out soon for the Far East. All by myself this evening, I had come to try and find a foretaste of it in a Chinese dance-hall in the Latin Quarter.

The head-waiter welcomed me with a smile. He was yellow as the moon. Here was one Asiatic to go on with.

“But your scheme of decoration is Louis XVI,” I said to him.

“We’ve only just taken the place over,” he pleaded. “Expenses are heavy. Bit by bit we’ll do it all up in pagoda style.”

“Your musicians don’t strike me as having anything Celestial about them, either.”

“You’re quite right, Monsieur. They’re Montmartre Cubans.”

“And your dancing-partners are from Montrouge, Montargis, or Montpellier at the furthest.”

“But our customers who come here to dance are mostly Coloured gentlemen,” he pointed out to me. “This evening we have eleven Cantonese, seven Pekinese, six Annamites, three Filipinos, and four Negroes.”

“That’s true.”

“And here’s something that will give you the right atmosphere, Monsieur.”

He served me, without waiting to be asked, with a liqueur, sickeningly sweet.

“What’s this—physic?”

“It’s our speciality. It’s Chinese.”

I drank it. Then, uncertain whether I should survive this potion, like Michael Strogoff, I looked around me, all eyes.

It was a curious spectacle, right in the heart of Paris. Out of forty couples dancing the *javas* of my native town I counted thirty in which the man was not White.

On the other hand, the feminine element included only one Yellow woman, or rather semi-Yellow: an Indo-Chinese half-breed. The other women were blondes, auburns, even brunettes, but all of them unquestionably of my own race, dubbed Aryan by the late Gobineau.

My country is one of free exchange. After all, why shouldn’t these human brethren of mine, fashioned in Asia or Africa, dance with those sprightly Frenchwomen?

When the revolving globe of the spotlight shed its medley of rays on the common herd, I could no longer make out anything myself but one composite personality of all colours, subject to that single law of rhythm and pleasure which is to-day so truly cosmopolitan.

My neighbours came and sat down again. She was a little French peasant girl, disguised as a Parisian. An ex-servant, or an ex-shop girl, with badly rouged cheeks and a nasty cough. He was a one hundred per cent Chinaman, with the real complexion, warranted not to come off in the wash.

It was she who was throwing herself at him. There was no doubt about that.

"So if you pass your examination, you'll be taking the next ship back home, to Shanghai, eh?"

"*Zoui, zoui.*"

"Say, will you take me with you?"

The prudent Son of Heaven made no reply.

"I tell you, I'll come with you, if you'll only pay my passage. I've told you already, I've had a friend like you before. I know all about China. Here, since the slump, it's nothing but restrictions. Besides, that warm country of yours would be better for this chest of mine."

"Winter very cold in Shanghai," declared the Chinaman; and he went off to the lavatory.

"Well, he's not going to make me a present of the trip, either," scatter-brains confided to me. She seemed quite resigned about it, though.

I studied her profile.

"So you really want to go travelling?"

"For all the fun I get, here in Paris. . . ."

"China isn't exactly Paradise."

"Don't you fret yourself about it. It's better organised than things are here, with fine boulevards and superfine places like the Moulin-Rouge."

"Yes, in Shanghai, and in Pekin. Nowhere else."

"Well, I'm not proposing to squander myself on the backwoods, either. This chap of mine this evening comes from Shanghai. The one before—I was *almost* engaged to him—was a Pekinese, like the dogs."

"Was he a student, too?"

"A Mandarin's eldest son. He was working for his doctor's degree. He was very fond of me, seeing that I could teach him good French, and slang too."

"Then why the . . . breach of promise?"

"Why did he let me down, you mean? His father cabled to him to come home at once. A month more, and he'd have married me."

"And you find it hard to get over it?"

"Oh, don't I miss him . . . You've no idea how delicately they handle women, those fellows. I keep on thinking that, if I could only get out to China, I'd meet that old flame of mine again and we'd get married."

"Why, you silly girl, China's enormous! Just to get from Pekin to Shanghai takes you days and days."

"I'd find my way about all right. I'm lucky about travelling. A card-reader told me all about it: a long voyage, a meeting, money, happiness with a short man with black hair. That's my man, of course."

"Yes, there aren't more than a couple of hundred million short men with black hair swarming about out there."

"Well, if it isn't my fate to find that particular lemon-face, I'll pick another. Any one of them is only too glad to get hold of a White woman."

"Really?" said I, taken by surprise.

With patronising pride, she pointed to the dance-floor.

"Just look at them dancing. They're as proud as Punch to have a White woman for their mistress. They find us much more attractive than those *mousmis* of theirs with their pigtailed down their backs. To begin with, they bow down to the men as though they were gods—just like slaves, you know. In bed, they must be like a block of wood. Whereas we treat them as equals."

"And they prefer that?"

"A real Chinaman likes nothing better than a little Parisian who can twist him round her finger. Besides, it flatters us too, poor whores like us, to know that we're worshipped like graven images."

"But would they treat you so respectfully among themselves, once they were miles away from Europe?"

"Among themselves, in Shanghai? If they did any harm to a single one of us, they would have to answer for it to the fellows who run the round."

"What round?"

"What round? The same as the Buenos Aires round, of course," she told me artlessly.

I started back in my chair. I was so much taken aback; for, at that time, I knew nothing about the business.

"A White Slave traffic? That way, in Asia, in China? You don't really mean it?"

"And why not?" she asked.

"But the South Americans are Whites, anyway."

"Or coffee-colour, as often as not!"

"Anyway, that's more reasonable," I protested.

"Nowadays, I tell you, the more Coloured they are, the crazier they are about us. All of them, everywhere, down to the purest of niggers. But the Yellow men are the nicest. Besides, they've got the most money."

"Not counting the coolies . . ."

"I've got a pal who's worked in Venezuela. She knew the *casitas* and all the ropes. Just now, she's resting on the Riviera, blowing her capital with a gigolo. But she told me she'd get herself sent out to Shanghai, sometime, when she wants to get back to business."

"So there are specialists in the business?"

"I've come here to find one, for that matter. There are Russians, so I'm told, and Japanese, too. Now that you can't count on the Argentine peso any more, from what they say, you can't do better than the Chinese dollar. . . ."

The soft blue jacket, surmounted by the face of a boyish Buddha, put in an appearance again, emerging from the basement.

"I'll rasp his ears with that refrain of mine again," my would-be traveller whispered to me, excitedly. "But I can't see him buying that ticket for me. Oh, isn't it just something to dream about—just a third-class single ticket direct to Shanghai? In five years, I'd come back home as fat as a quail, and a millionaire into the bargain. . . ."

She stifled a fit of coughing in her handkerchief.

"Have I been listening," I wondered, "to the heart's cry of a *Dame aux Camélias*, 1930 style?"

Then I proceeded to digest those astonishing things she had said.

"A White Slave round to Shanghai?" I kept on wondering. "Surely she must be exaggerating? One swallow does not make a spring. Nor does one wayfarer mean a regular road. . . . Besides, this wayfarer hasn't even trodden the road. She simply wants to tread it. She's just dreaming!"

That night passed by, and so did many days, and I had plenty of other things to think about. I had taken a note of it; but I had almost forgotten all about it.

And then—still before my departure for Asia—came that other incident, no less fortuitous, at Gustave's. Gustave's is a place where you meet people. He happens to be a barber.

CHAPTER II

I MEET A MAN FROM THERE

FOR the past ten years I have lived in the Batignolles district. It is a convenient neighbourhood. A hundred paces west, and I am in sight of the middle-class Plaine Monceau. As far east and I am navigating the avenue de Clichy. On the surface of this avenue, gentlemen who never do any work themselves float restfully.

One morning I turned in this direction. I was wearing a sweater, lest I should make myself conspicuous. I was on my way to an artist who deigned to “refresh” my hair, as they say. I went into M. Gustave’s. The company in his laboratory was limited to one customer, who was already “in hands.” I sat down below the coat-rack, satisfied that I should not have to wait long.

The mirrors showed me my predecessor, sometimes lathered with soap, sometimes with a towel over his head. No doubt about it, he was a fine specimen of his type. His lovely twenty-five-years’-old mug evoked both the androgyne and the bulldog. Sleek, square-built, splendid, he had something about him of the film “tough” and the sergeant-major.

But what a lot of attention such gallants need! Quarters of an hour went by. M. Gustave’s sole patient still sat in his arm-chair. Hair-cut, beard-trim, shampoo, singeing, friction, massage, waving—he had them all. I realised why the regular customers had fled. His presence meant obstruction for the whole morning.

In desperation, I exhorted myself to get up and go, too. For his part, heedless of time, he ran through the illustrated papers. He addressed occasional remarks to the respectful hairdresser which showed that he was just back from a long journey.

“A little off the eyebrows, don’t you think, Monsieur Louis?”

“Yes, don’t leave them too bushy; but don’t take them all off, either. . . . Just look at this photo, Gustave: one of the Basque ball-teams at Shanghai. Vincente, Cubano, Bilbao. . . . Ah, those are the fellows! I went to see them play three times a week at the Auditorium, as they call it, with my wife. . . .”

“Have you heard from her? Good news?” asked Gustave. The minute care he was taking betrayed his secret dread of the wild beast he was trimming.

“Good enough. She’ll get on all right,” growled Louis, to close any further conversation about that.

At this point my boredom did me a service. For I broke into the conversation in sheer despair, without the least idea of finding anything out. I didn’t understand as yet, I must admit. But I was falling asleep where I sat, and I heard the word: “Shanghai.”

“Excuse me,” I cried, “but are you back from China? I’m going there soon myself.”

There was a silence. Then M. Louis got up to have a look at my reflection in the mirror.

At a distance, my *négligé* must have satisfied him. I was hoarse, and the sound of my voice made a good impression on him. He honoured me—such was my luck—with a presumption of fraternity.

“What,” he said, “you too?”

“Eh?” said I.

“You’re taking up position there?”

Let those who have never told a fib, in order to learn something, cast the first stone at me. I understood, all at once. Without even stopping to think I accepted the situation.

"Of course," I murmured, at a venture.

M. Gustave had no idea how much he was helping me out when he remarked:

"You're finding America disappointing, aren't you?"

"In Chile and Brazil, the exchange has collapsed," explained M. Louis, with his eyes closed beneath the lipping scissors. "From Argentina it's impossible to get your money out. You can convert your pesos into a mortgage note—that's a dodge of their own—but in France the paper loses at least thirty per cent of its value."

I cleared my throat.

"So," I pronounced boldly, "Shanghai is better?"

"Quite another matter. The Chinaman is nothing like the American. Where do you know, in the way of business?"

"Chicago," I declared.

M. Louis was no schoolboy. But his pride would not let him suspect that I was fooling him. He even spared me the necessity of displaying my real knowledge of the Black Belt and Twenty-second Street.

"Chicago! That's a fine place, too," he said, with a little approving whistle. "Is it true that the girls are crazy about the negroes? Talk about competition!"

"That's where you get the gangsters," added the hairdresser, as he waxed Louis's eyebrows.

"It's all run by gangs, with a pull on the police and even on the administration, isn't it?" Louis went on. "So, if the gang-boss doesn't give you leave, you can strike out for all you're worth, and you'll still sink."

"Sure, kid," said I, through my nose.

"In China, it's very much the same thing, except that they change the name. Instead of 'rackets,' they say 'guilds.' Everything in China, from beggars to generals, goes by guilds—and they're all in league. Did you know that?"

"I've heard a bit about it."

"You'll see for yourself, my son. In Shanghai, even more than in Chicago, you can never work all by yourself. Even if your women had proper passports and kept quiet, they'd be tripped up at the first corner—and then sent back home. Or else a local combine would pick them up, while the police arrested you on some pretext or other."

"They sound treacherous," remarked Gustave.

"Too sweet to be wholesome—that's what they are," corrected Louis, now well started. "If they don't like you, they don't come and tell you so with a machine-gun. But the 'boy' puts poison in your curry. And you, poor innocent, you lick your fingers, because it's so tasty. . . . Not too much brilliantine, Gustave. A little powder. . . ."

"So on the whole, China's a complicated place," I ventured.

"Even more than that. They've got the secret society mania: any number of subterfuges, even in connection with things which aren't in the least mysterious. On the spot, everybody's edified; but it's disconcerting when you first get there. One slang for your guild, and quite a different one for the Nankin guild, or simply the one on the other side of the Wang-pu. And then, they squeeze you. You know what that means?"

"It means getting a bribe, a commission, doesn't it?"

"Exactly. They blackmail you. It's quite the thing to do, from top to bottom, even among officials. You have to pay nearly everybody. But then you get to know the

ropes, and you can take your revenge. Suppose your women squeeze you. You squeeze them, to get your money back.”

“A nice game,” opined M. Gustave, admiringly.

For my part, I suddenly felt ill at ease in the peace of the barber’s shop. Everything has an end, and the interminable toilette of lovely Louis was drawing to a close. He stood up and stretched himself. Gustave brushed him down tenderly.

“I’m not asking you for any secrets,” he said to me, still with his back turned, “but I’ve never seen you round about Clichy before. Whereabouts in Paris are you on the job?”

I said nothing. He turned round sharply.

“Hey, you,” he growled, “what’s all this yarn of yours about being in the business?”

He stared at me, within arm’s length. All of us carry more of the truth about ourselves on our faces than we think.

“I’m going to Shanghai as a journalist,” I declared, with my utmost politeness. “That’s why *you* interest me so much, Monsieur Louis.”

His fists clenched. Wrath and good humour strove within him. Finally the little god of love vanquished the snarling bulldog. His fierce face relaxed.

“Well, you fooled me all right. Yes, you certainly fooled me,” he repeated, half-bewildered, half-flattered.

He drove his elbow into the anxious M. Gustave.

“Couldn’t you tell me to look out, you old curling-iron? Didn’t you know the gentleman, eh? Oh, well, I suppose it didn’t dawn on you that I was being interviewed, either.”

He turned to weigh me up again, glowering at me.

“Mind what you write about me in your articles,” he threatened. “Above all, don’t you say that I gave away any of my comrades to you. That wouldn’t do me any good, or you either. I’ve known people in Shanghai whom they’ve punished for less.”

“If I publish anything about the traffic in China, it won’t be until I get back—it won’t be for months,” I countered. “And the names of my informants, even the circumstances of my interviews with them, will be modified and veiled, in accordance with such professional fairness as you might expect.”

“Well, that’s all right, then. But another thing—not too much of your jokes out there. Don’t you try to play the man in the know, as you did just now. I know people who wouldn’t like it.”

“Thanks for the hint,” said I. “Then I can take you to witness: an exportation of flowers from Paris to Shanghai is being organised?”

He burst out laughing.

“Now you’re talking. Here’s one fact for you. The Chinese find White women very toothsome. Their own are sometimes pretty. But almost all of them are regular blocks of ice, you know. At the moment, my group and I are still rather in the position of forerunners, so far as Montmartre goes. On the Left Bank, so I’m told, it’s quite commonplace already. But at the ‘Costa,’ at the ‘Ange,’ at the ‘Abbaye,’ at all the best pitches here, most of the ‘sports’ are still putting their money on America. Still, I hear they’re going to open, in the rue Fontaine, a place to be called ‘Shanghai’ . . .”

“And in China itself?”

“Out there I can recommend you to some friends of mine. Do you know, Monsieur, they’re often the best of Frenchmen?”

“And why shouldn’t they be?” I returned, a bit taken aback though I was.

He shook hands with me—with a fist. I gave him back his grip as best I could, muscle for muscle. As soon as he released me, I hastened to the police.

But it was not, as you may imagine, in order to denounce M. Louis the forerunner, that new, that invaluable acquaintance of mine.

CHAPTER III

I SEEK TO SATISFY MY CURIOSITY

NOW that I had received two testimonies that a “prostitution round” existed between my country and China, I did what any true Frenchman would do. I went to inquire from our magnificent administration whether my informants had not been making game of me.

I am not joking. Our administration really is magnificent. The proof of this is that I obtained not one reply, but several replies, as contradictory and doubtful as anybody could want.

For days and days I haunted the Prefecture of Police, and the Ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and the Colonies.

“Have you come for a licence to sell tobacco, for a decoration, or for a free pardon?” the doorkeepers used to ask me.

“No,” I explained. “I want to know how far China appreciates Frenchwomen.”

They would have taken me for a madman, and a dangerous one, if I had not sent in my name to some officials who were friends of mine. No doubt they regarded me as a meddler—like all those who wield a pen—but a harmless and even a well-meaning one.

They received me in the august penumbra of their green lamp-shades. Here my question suddenly struck me as frivolous, if not scandalous. Nevertheless, I repeated it boldly.

“Do you want us to reply officially?” was the counter-question I was asked, in substance, by all these gentlemen: directors, inspectors, and first-class clerks of the Republic.

“Why not?”

“Because, if you do, we cannot tell you anything except through the usual channels, after formal request and investigation, including reference to the different Ministries concerned and our Consuls abroad. . . .”

“You will all be dead by then. No, I don’t want you to reply officially.”

Hereupon my friends, glad of a chance to relax, got out of their fine leather arm-chairs. They talked to me familiarly, unofficially. I was able to recognise their independence of mind. All of them, for that matter, were devoted to France, the eternal: even against her passing parliaments.

“You want to know whether any Frenchwomen are going to China for purposes of prostitution, just as others go to South America?” they murmured.

“Exactly.”

It was here that the replies varied according to the person concerned. There was the humorist.

“What, are even our Breton girls going to make their fortunes on the banks of the Yangtse-kiang?” He reached for a note-pad. “I don’t believe we’ve ever thought about it here as yet. It’s an odd idea. We must look into it. Thanks for the suggestion. . . .”

There was the pessimistic statistician.

“My dear fellow, you’re touching on a very serious matter there. We believe, in France, that we have solved the racial problem by officially ignoring it. Our statistics take no account of pigmentation. I cannot tell you how many *non-White* people there are in our territory.”

But out of the office next door came an optimist.

"Who among us is absolutely White, except Pierrot in a harlequinade with flour on his face?" asked this third holder of an opinion. "I am dark, and you are fair. Each of us is black or yellow, compared with people with paler complexions. . . . So France is quite right to pay no attention to the shades of her guests' skins."

"Meanwhile," the man of figures went on, "every year we are installing thirty-five thousand soldiers of Colour in our home garrisons. Three thousand and sixty-six Chinese have permission to live in Paris, and five thousand two hundred in the provinces. The unregistered Chinese and the Annamites are much more numerous. The number of negroes is at least equal. All these sons of the sun have almost incredible amorous adventures, and cross their blood with ours. They present us with any quantity of little mulattoes. We are undergoing a regular process of *colonisation the wrong way round*. Our country is in danger of hybridisation, like Spain and Portugal. . . ."

"So much the better," cried the optimist. "Have you read Vasconcellos? He's a Mexican ethnologist. He predicts the coming of a single race, half-bred and cosmopolitan, which will live a life of pleasure in the Tropics. . . ."

"Let's talk about the White Slave traffic in Asia," I begged.

"I'm sorry," said the statistician. "Here are leaflets in connection with the traffic in America. So far as China is concerned, I have no information as yet."

"Must I assume from that that nothing is happening?"

"What a poor joke! . . . A leaflet is a consecration," whispered the optimist. "We leave you newspaper men the honour of sounding an alarm. Then we issue a denial, as a matter of form. After that, when the question has matured, we admit it to our archives."

"Well, what is your entirely personal opinion?" I persisted.

"Hundreds of Frenchwomen disappear every year," said the man of figures. "Their number is increasing since the slump.¹ Some of them are murdered. And some of them are carried off by force. . . ."

"In such cases, when the victim is found, dead or alive, don't you get a report from the police, or from a consulate?"

"Yes, but such cases are the exception. The great majority of women who disappear, in all social classes, are quite well aware where they are being taken. They go of their own free will, and they refuse repatriation, if our officials abroad propose it to them. That situation is stereotyped, so far as Argentina goes."

"So, presumably, it would be in the case of China. Do many women travellers apply for a Chinese *visa* on their passports?"

"No, the proportion is not high. But emigrants can go freely, to begin with, to Indo-China. The Chinese frontiers and coasts are, as you may imagine, more permeable than the American. Besides, in Shanghai they know how to touch up passports."

"The exodus towards Buenos Aires is diminishing—there's no doubt about that," interjected the optimist.

"Financial prostration is cramping even debauchery in those countries, which used to be so spendthrift," the pessimist agreed. "It is becoming difficult to get the money you make out of them."

"You talk like M. Louis," I observed.

"Who's he? A statistician?"

"No, he's a philanthropist. In short, your definite opinion?"

"We can only make assumptions," they said.

¹ The French police inquire every year into more than twenty-five thousand cases of disappearance. But many of these cases are soon closed, as the person concerned reappears of his or her own accord.

“But what assumptions?”

“These,” pronounced the man of figures. “Let us suppose that *two-thirds* of the White women who disappear from France, Belgium, Germany, et cetera, proceed to follow the highways of mercenary love. . . .”

“One-third for virtue—that’s a pretty high proportion,” I remarked.

“Out of these two-thirds, we have reason to believe that *one-half* still steer towards the West: to Latin America. But we should not be surprised if the remainder took the Eastern route, *in accordance with a new current*, towards East Africa, India, the Indian archipelago, Indo-China, China, and even Japan. Undoubtedly, in that direction Shanghai would be the main cross-road. That’s a mere supposition. . . .”

“The word seems happily chosen.”

“If you want to verify it, you must go and see for yourself.”

“Good. That’s just what I’m going to do.”

In fact, the following week I arrived at Marseilles to embark.

It was raining in Marseilles. Just imagine that! Marseilles in the wet is no place for a drink.

The ship sailed about four o’clock. It was noon. I had bought a sun-helmet. I carried it under my arm, and gazed with horror at the streaming gutters, from under the shelter of an arcade in the rue Paradis.

“Hullo, what are you doing here?” a friendly voice hailed me.

CHAPTER IV

WOMEN TRAVELLERS TO ASIA EMBARK AT MARSEILLES

I HAD been hailed by a little man, all rotundity, respectability, and smiles. He resembled Marius's Panisse-Charpin just as Nature may resemble art: in other words, with less naturalness. But he had a certain *cachet* of his own, in the setting of the rue Paradis.

"Well, well, what good wind blows you here?"

"A mania for being somewhere else," said I. "And what about you?"

"Still following the stream. Can we lunch together?"

"Alas, I'm due at an official banquet at La Reserve."

"A banquet! Leave it alone! I've got my business coupé here, up a lane. I'll take you to eat one of those *bouillabaisse*s. . . . You know, made from a family recipe. It will put some sunshine into you, in this accursed weather."

"Yes, really, rain in Marseilles, my dear Monsieur Robert! Can't you hear them talking about it, north of Valence? Your city will be losing its legend."

"Come, come!" said he, a bit offended. "The only thing is that, if you don't mind, I want to call on a few friends on the way."

We went.

I call him simply Robert here. He is an influential man in politics, in his own Provence; and in Lyons he is a vendor of sexual satisfaction. He owns a retiring, but famous house not far from the Saône, which deserves to become a historical monument.

Loving the Riviera too, he started another establishment there. Then, since success demands ubiquity but does not confer it, he got married. Some men marry their mistresses. A former sub-mistress of his seemed to Robert a more suitable choice. They share the two-fold management. She, like he, spends two weeks of every month in the Lugdunian capital, and two weeks on the coast.

This system is so much the better in that their conjugal life, thus reduced to a minimum, does not weary them. They meet in Marseilles every fortnight to take counsel together.

"I'm expecting my wife by the evening train," Robert confided to me, once we were in the car. "We've had a spot of trouble in Nice. I had to turn out a girl called Irma, who was becoming positively poisonous. It's a pity, because she had her regular clients. I've got to replace her at once."

"You'll do that easily enough," I said. "And that reminds me: you can tell me something. Do you know anything about an export route—in short, a White Slave traffic, towards Shanghai and China, just in the same way as towards Buenos Aires?"

He jumped at the steering-wheel.

"What? No, never! It's all nonsense. Even the traffic towards Buenos Aires has been very much exaggerated," he declared.

I shut up, guessing that I had touched him on a sore spot. M. Robert is a sensitive soul, and a man with a taste for letters. I made his acquaintance in a bookshop, where he was buying copies of limited editions.

He soon started talking again, of his own accord. He asked me what were the best things published in Paris. Meanwhile, the coupé ploughed its way through a Massilia which the rainstorm had turned into a lacustrine city.

M. Robert's friends belonged to all classes. He left me to plunge into elegant little private houses on the Prado and the boulevard Chave, and then into dreary barracks of

flats on the cours d'Arenc. But most of the time we stopped outside ramshackle, charming old houses in the neighbourhood of the Town Hall, the quai du Port, the place Vivaux, and the rue de la Renarde. If you know Marseilles, you can see the places for yourself. It was for no lack of trying that my host failed to acquire the better appetite he would certainly have had if he had managed, before lunch, to find somebody to take Irma's place.

Left by myself during his calls, I meditated about the wonderful cosmopolitanism of this unique city.

"That way, you have the Madagascans," I said to myself. "The other way, the Kabyles and the Tonkinese. Opium is sold hereabouts. Everything is sold—even chimpanzees for rejuvenation grafts. Emigrants have their caravanserais in Marseilles, and so do immigrants. If there really is a smugglers' traffic of women destined for Asia, it's here that it must inevitably have its point of assembly and departure. It's here that they must embark."

But the flat denial of Robert, the expert, shattered my half-certainty. Who would know, if this merchant prince didn't?

"Nothing suitable in sight," he sighed, bounding straight back into the car. "If I wasn't looking for anybody, I'd have a dozen offers. . . . Well, it can't be helped, this time. Now for our *bouillabaisse*!"

A few minutes later, it was still raining; but we really had our throats, and even our souls, full of sunshine, thanks to a *rascasse* soup and a bottle of Tavel such as tourists never drink.

The recipe, a family one, doubtless handed down from generation to generation, was nevertheless simply the property of the cook-landlord of a tavern, a tubby, tanned Phocian, and an old brother-at-arms of my friend Robert. His castle was called the "Florida." To begin with, we were the only flowers in it. But, a little later on, a brunette girl pushed the door-screen of clicking bamboo and beads aside, and came in and sat down to table too.

"Fried fish, and a garlic salad," she ordered.

Her voice was decided, but with something tired, something broken and bitter about it. All at once, my host nudged me.

"Talk about chance! She's just the style of Irma, all ready to be gaffed," he murmured.

He whistled, and the barman came up.

"Do you know her?"

"She's on the music-hall stage."

"I'll bet she's been in a brothel."

"She may have. She's going away. She's staging an acrobatic turn, out Saigon way."

"With whom?"

"With a Chinaman."

"Ask her to come over later on and have a liqueur with us."

The girl accepted the invitation, with a churlish gesture, and without a smile.

"Well, did you hear that?" Robert said to me. "Can it be true?"

He flew into a temper. Tavel is a quarrelsome wine.

"China? Yellow men? I always thought that, in their nostrils, Whites stank of rotteness. And the fare costs a lot, too. You'd heard that this was starting, had you?"

"Even in Asia, everything is a matter of fashion," I explained.

"So, apart from America, this Shanghai of yours is going to rob us of our best attractions, is it? Bah, well may they say that a Frenchwoman never defends herself! She'll go with anybody. But what's the Government doing about it?"

"You're very nationalist, Master Robert."

"I've never sent a woman outside of France. When Asiatics or negroes come to my places, I don't turn them away. . . ."

"Oh, you don't, eh?"

"But I've given orders that they're not to be encouraged. So it's getting to be a regular thing, is it? They do it for choice? This girl who calls herself a music-hall artist! . . . An acrobat: so likely, isn't it? We'll see. . . ."

We did.

"A Kümmel, if I've got to have something," said the sullen brunette, as she sat down with us.

Robert did not handle her with kid gloves.

"You've *worked*," he declared, without any preamble, simply laying down the law.

She looked at us scornfully, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, I have. And what about it? I worked in Paris, round by the reservoir."

"A fine place! And what are they dragging you into now, my poor girl? Prostituting yourself with all those greenery-yallery devils. But still, you're no Messalina. . . ."

In Marseilles, plain speaking is still a tradition, and an accepted one. But, this time, the girl burst out:

"No preaching from you, see? What other monkey-land do you want me to go to, eh? Brazil, or Canada, or where? I know very well that you end up on the broad of your back, wherever it is."

"Why not stay in France?" Robert suggested.

"Not I! I'll get just as many clients in China. The colour of their skin doesn't make any difference to me. But, at least, I shall learn what does interest me."

"And what's that?"

"The secret of their suppleness, if you want to know. And their jugglers' tricks. Serious work, from my point of view, is acrobatic dancing."

"Then why did you go in for the 'slaughterhouse'?" cut in my companion, suddenly savage. They will use these euphemisms, when they get worked up. . . .

"I had a child to bring up. He's dead, now," retorted the music-hall girl. She flicked the tears off her made-up eyes.

She told us a few fragments of a dreadful tale. The bar-keeper had set his gramophone going: "Make love to me. . . . Tell me your tale of love. . . ."

"And now I haven't got anything to hold me any more," she wound up. "I'm not going back into any of your red-lamp houses, let me tell you. I'm going to see the world. I'll do what I have to do. But when I come back, I know I'll be able to make a start on the music-hall stage with a style all my own. Have you seen enough of me, eh? Thanks for the Kümmel."

"What ship are you sailing in?" I asked her.

"So that you can go and tell the police, eh?"

Robert drove me down to my ship, at La Pinède. The rain kept on dropping from Heaven like a blessing. The big steamer, alongside the shed, looked like a house with smoking chimneys, which had got into the water, like some simpleton, to keep out the wet.

“We never get this kind of weather here,” vowed my good Marseillais pilot. “Once you get outside the Château d’If, you’ll find a blue sky.”

Then his grievance got the better of him again.

“Did you hear what she said, that fool of a bitch? She could have taken Irma’s place, just like her twin. I’d have given her such a nice time. Look here, I’m beginning to believe in this Road to Shanghai of yours.”

“The case of that girl acrobat is exceptional,” I remarked.

“Oh, is it? They all hypnotise themselves with some mirage or other. Juggling for one, and the theatre for the next. . . . And it’s Chinamen who get them to go! We French taxpayers will soon be left with nowhere to turn.”

“My dear Robert! . . . You’ve plenty left.”

“Get on board!” this avenger of outraged virtue bade me. “Go ahead with this investigation of yours. Have a look at the third-class. Ransack the ship. . . . You may find some more of these unfortunate girls stowed away! It may be only a beginning; but Asia’s going to be worse than America.”

“I’ll have a look round,” I promised him, as I went up the gangway. “But don’t switch over from incredulity too far the other way. Don’t let’s have any panic in Marseilles! For that matter, even if all your Irmas expatriate themselves, you can always get Chinese girls. . . .”

Thereupon I started making friends with the stewards.

CHAPTER V

A SIBERIAN PEARL IN THE YELLOW CASKET

“**I** SUPPOSE you haven’t got any girls hidden in the bunkers?” I asked the chief steward of the ship.

“Oh, Monsieur! . . .”

“Or in the life-boats? Nobody in your ventilators either, eh? That’s where stow-aways for Alexandria or Beirut usually bestow themselves.”

“Yes, but that’s a short passage. With us, carrying the Far Eastern mail, they would have to go at least as far as Singapore. More than three weeks. So they’d be likely to get cramp!”

“I’ll take your word for it. In the first-class have you got any women travelling to China all by themselves, apart from good ladies going out to join husbands who are officials?”

“What you’re looking for is a White woman attracted by the Yellows, eh?”

“Brother, you said it.”

“Well, we’ve got a Russian woman—and a pretty one, too, as you’ll see for yourself—who is married to a rich Chinese merchant in Hong-Kong. She’s going out to rejoin him.”

“That’s just what I’m after. For the love of God and the late Czar, put me at her table.”

“Can’t be done. She’s already asked to be put at a separate table with a Resident in Indo-China who has a native wife, and their son. You can interview her in the public rooms.”

“I’ll do it right away.”

But woman disposes of what man proposes, above all when she is a Russian, and even on board the China mail.

Gigantic though a liner may be, you are obliged—unless you condemn yourself to stay in your cabin—to mix with your fellow-passengers, almost as much as on a ferry-boat. Nevertheless, this confounded Russian woman turned Chinese, without even knowing who I was, instinctively evaded me, morning, noon, and night, before we got to Djibouti, in the Turkish bath of the Red Sea and even until we were the other side of verdant Ceylon. She always managed to do it. If I thought I had her cornered in the swimming-pool, she had already gone up to the smoke-room. This enraged me all the more because, apart from her interest for me as a reporter, I found her far from unattractive. Her eel-like slipperiness gave me some idea of the temperament of these girls of Slav blood crossed with Mongol; for, in fact, blonde, pink, and white though she might be, she was still simply an Asiatic, born at Harbin and thence gone south in search of a Yellow conquest—in short, a Siberian. I don’t wish you one, if you prefer a quiet time in your love-affairs.

The Satanic Olga Ho-Hing—such was her Russo-Chinese name—escaped me, above all, by taking advantage of her connection with the two races. In the first-class we had Whites, Colonials and tourists. But we also had passengers of Colour, Mandarins in their robes or in European dress. Equality of treatment constitutes a dogma on board French ships. Despite this, the two races tended to segregate. That’s the way things are.

But Olga circulated between one race and the other. She was amphibious. And whenever, a mixer myself by virtue of my profession, I paid a visit to a group of hon-

ourable Celestials in order to meet her, I saw her detach herself from them, cross the “no man’s land,” and mingle with the Europeans.

For my part, I was trapped. Mr. Ngu-yen and Mr. Wang would have been outraged if I had left their company in less than fifty minutes of compliments and bows.

Perhaps, after all, it was they who sent poor Olga back and forth like a tennis-ball. For she did not stay long among the pale-faces either. The puritans in both camps despised her for sharing herself. I met many a woman afterwards as isolated as she was. There are other things besides advantages in being able to say: “I’m a bird; look at my wings! . . . No, I’m a mouse; hurrah for the rats!”

In short, I was utterly baffled about questioning her, until the day came when the ship gave up all her secrets, when unsuspected faces made their appearance, when hitherto hopeless flirtations flowered into sudden triumph to the strains of jazz: the day—or rather the night—of the fête “for seamen’s charities.” On the morrow we were to round Achem Head, the northern port of Sumatra.

That night I got into the lift to go up from “A” Deck to “D” Deck at the same time as a ravishing French girl, one of the reigning toasts in Saigon. It was stifling, despite the electric fans, and she was wearing next to nothing. Her shoulders, her breasts, her hips—I could have described them as though I had modelled them myself. Not that I complained about that.

But with us went up, too, an Indo-Chinese “boy,” the lift-boy. I had often admired the naturalness with which this perfect servant imitated a statue of yellow wood. No expression; no looking at anybody; the movements of an automaton. I wondered: “Where does one wind him up?”

Well, all at once, by sheer chance, my eyes stopped feasting themselves. They caught sight of the “boy.”

He, too, was feasting himself on that lovely White nudity. It had made his slits of eyes open wide. The yellow wood had come to life. It was looking; it was desiring. The statue had betrayed the man inside.

It was, for that matter, only a flash. Feeling himself observed, he dehumanised himself again on the spot. His eyes reverted to slits; he was all yellow wood, as before. But I knew, now.

“My dear boy,” I said to him, inside myself, “if that’s how all of you feel! . . . Of course, why shouldn’t you? I understood you quite well. The specimens of your ivory ladies of Asia on board have neither the carnal splendour nor the *brio* of this Parisian girl. But, now that your lust is awakened, we Whites must henceforth mount guard carefully around the treasure of our own women.”

At last I ran the Siberian girl down, at the corner of an alleyway.

“Hands up!” I cried to her.

Since fancy-dress was the rule, with the help of a tomato-coloured muffler, a cap and lovelocks made out of lamp-black down on my temples, I had camouflaged myself as an apache. One does the best one can. For her part, she was disguised as a sleigh-driver. She laughed, her bells tinkled, and we were friends.

“Yes, it’s true,” she told me, in that pretty, cooing voice of hers, “I have insulted the race of my fathers! I have lain in the arms of a Chinaman! He has re-baptised me Teng-Pao, which means: ‘Precious gift of the red lantern.’ But I loathe this love-name of mine, for it might lead one to suppose that my husband picked me out of a brothel. Blessed angels, how mortified my mother would be! She was a Countess at the Imperial Court.”

I did not annoy her by discussing the point. She was more likely to be a daughter of *moujiks*.

“And how do you get on with Mr. Ho-Hing?”

“At the beginning, I had to carry on a terrible fight with my mother-in-law and the whole Chinese tribe. Then I got the upper hand, for my husband worshipped me.”

“He’s nice to you?”

“He’s my pet pigeon.”

“In short, she plucks him,” I said to myself. And I went on:

“And he lets you travel so far away from home?”

“He sends me to Europe himself, every three years,” she corrected. “He’s no fool. He can guess how I feel.”

“During the war we used to call our holidays of the same kind: ‘rest leave.’ ”

“Yes, I can relax when I’m away from Hong Kong. I don’t mind telling you, I have one or two little love-affairs. . . .”

“That’s quite natural.”

“I go to London to talk business with big brokers who are customers of Mr. Ho-Hing. And then, above all, I go to Paris.”

“The Mecca of all women!”

“You’re right. A wonderful city! My husband has never been there himself. But he knows that only in Paris can you swim in fashion.”

“What a bath!”

“When I get home, he lets off crackers in my honour, and he says to me: ‘As a white goddess of the land of snows, you were already worth a hundred ingots of gold. But now, Paris-dressed, you are worth more than a hundred times a hundred.’ ”

“He’s certainly a man of taste. In short, you are happy with him?”

“Don’t bring me bad luck! . . . Alas, I haven’t given him any children yet. And he absolutely must have a son, to preserve the tablets of his ancestors after him.”

“So Mr. Ho-Hing reveres the place Vendôme, but he also obeys Confucius. Well, he’s within his rights. And . . . are White women, married like yourself, numerous today in China?”

“Russian women from Siberia? I should just say so! . . . From Petrograd and Moscow, the refugees made their way to Constantinople and America. We in the East have been fleeing from Siberian soil for the past fifteen years, into the midst of the Yellows. Why? Because of our horror of that negation of luxury which the Bolsheviks started.”¹

“Oh, I see. . . .”

“If I had married a Red from Harbin, he wouldn’t have fed me on fine lake duck and sent me to your Paris dressmakers.”

“No, hardly. That’s a reasonable ground for migrating. As for the colour of your children . . .”

“The colour of my frocks, first, if you don’t mind. It went on too long for us—revolution and rags. My elder sisters still believed in the future prosperity of a new White Russia. So, when they sold themselves to Chinamen, they swore that it was a violation. We of the younger generation have stopped crying about it. We sell our bodies, frankly. . . . Oh, yes, you’ll find plenty of Siberian women in China, like the pearls of a broken necklace. . . .”

“Fat China is the oyster in which you seek shelter, poor little pearls,” I murmured.

¹ For the sake of impartiality, I may note that later I met another Siberian woman in Shanghai. This one regretted the Soviet Paradise. She would have gone back there, if she had enough money to travel to the frontier.

At this moment a rather fine-looking fellow dressed as a Cossack (he must have been hot!) passed along the alleyway. I noticed that he made a familiar, even a rude sign to my Siberian pearl.

“Is he a brother of yours, a lover of yours, or a guardian of yours?” I asked.

“Just a fellow-countryman,” she said, shaking her head. “An ex-officer of Koltchak’s. . . . But he’s a naturalised American.”

And she added, in a lower tone of voice, with obvious affection:

“Poor lamb! He’s good-looking, isn’t he? Amid all the trials of exile, he’s shown himself clever, too. He’s managed to turn his charm to account.”

“What’s his profession, then?”

“*Pajalousta*. . . . You’re very curious.”

“Forgive me, but my own profession is to find things out.”

All at once she burst out laughing.

“In that case,” she jeered, “practise your profession yourself!”

“Thanks for the good advice!”

And I hurried in the wake of the Cossack. He was going downstairs to the second-class.

On fête-night on board, traditional tolerance threw the first-class open to anybody, so long as he behaved himself. On the other hand, every class of passengers had its own amusements.

“Have I picked one up?” I wondered, as I steered my course by the Cossack’s fine Astrakhan cap.

Back in Paris, I had heard about Russian intermediaries for the better-class traffic on the “Road to Shanghai.”

CHAPTER VI

FÊTE-NIGHT ON BOARD; OR, DANCING ON THREE DECKS

ON “D” Deck—the luxury deck—I had just seen the rich *en fête*. Delirious jazz musicians in dinner-jackets; marble halls; stewards in tail-coats; sumptuous fancy-dress, and bosoms set in real diamonds—it was an evening in a big hotel, neither more nor less. You had to lean over the rail to remind yourself of the dark immensity that splashed around the great ship, which, in certain circumstances, might go to the bottom so easily.

One deck down, on “C” Deck, whither the Russian led me, I found the more modest setting of the second-class. Still a hall; an upright piano instead of a grand. Here good people with no desire to be fashionable were dancing too, disdaining permission to go up and mix with the aristocracy.

Fête Number Two! In this one the sea had more share. I could see it gliding past, with its spray closer, along the vistas that led to the hold-hatches. But my Cossack was descending yet another companion-way, surmounted by the notice: “Third-class.”

Another deck lower, nearer to the nauseous water and more remote from the airy upper decks. The heat and the stale smell oppressed me. But still, under the electric lights the white walls were just as spotless as those higher up. This poorest class in a modern liner, you may be sure, would seem miraculous to the most privileged passengers by the sailing-packets of a century ago.

For my part, as I plunged down like this into the bowels of the ship, I thought about all the unavowed things, all the clandestine things, that lay concealed within these Asia mail-steamers, often stuffed with arms outward bound, and with opium homeward bound.

Somebody—who wanted to do me a service—said to me one day:

“You write, don’t you? Take care, in your scribbling, not to call attention to opium-smuggling.”

“What would happen to me if I did?”

“Quite simple. . . . Steps would be taken to discredit you, to blacken your character.”

“But suppose there were no ground for doing so?”

“It could still be done. There are such things as forgeries.”

“How delightful! So much for opium. And what if I interested myself instead in the lucrative traffic in rifles, machine-guns, and such playthings?”

“Then you’d never live to be an old man.”¹

That’s as may be. But to return to our muttons. White Slave smuggling is something in itself.

I had suddenly lost track of my noctambulist Russian. Something distracted me, there was a turn in the alleyway—and nobody at all! Had he gone into his cabin?

I heard music. I made my way towards the sound. I came out on to the open part of “A” Deck, cluttered with windlasses and chains, up towards the bow. It corresponded with the old-time forecastle. It was an open-air balcony, shared between the crew and the “thirds.”

¹ It was an entirely novel documentation about the arms traffic that poor Albert Londres was bringing back from his last investigation in Asia.

Here I stumbled into the midst of a third fête, not the least gay, or the least picturesque.

The orchestra was an old phonograph with a horn. But an accordion-player, with bare, tattooed arms accompanied the waltzes on his instrument. Amid the lockers and struts, in the fawn-coloured shadow cast by the regulation lights, couples were dancing, just the same as higher up: humble women passengers with stewards and sailors, emigrants with stewardesses. Here the women were in a minority. Several couples of sailors were dancing together.

It all smelt of tar, iodine, sweat, musk, and perhaps also (I have a Customs-officer's nose) that notorious opium.

You will recall that I had blacked my face to turn myself into an apache. I rubbed this masquerade off with my handkerchief. Here it would annoy people.

I posted myself behind a fire-extinguisher. Crouching beside me, Chinese and Hindus gaped at the spectacle of the Whites' ball. Everywhere all the world over, they are our spectators like this.

My Russian had, indeed, gone to take off his Cossack's coat and cap. He reappeared, wearing just his blouse, and brushed past me without recognising me.

He started dancing right away, putting his arm round the waist of a commonplace red-haired minx. Within the next few minutes, it struck me: "Why, I know that girl myself! . . ."

I had to wait long enough before she was by herself again.

At last the Russian said: "I'm going to bed," and she replied: "I'm going to stay."

He took himself off. I went up to the girl before anybody else could take her for a partner.

Then it dawned on me that I did not know her at all. No, I had never set eyes on her, personally. But she was the type of woman who is most familiar to me: the commonest type of messenger girl, of milliners' girl in our suburbs. There are girls just like her in Paris by the thousand.

We danced. My mistake had put me on a friendly footing with her from the start; and she answered my questions very frankly.

"You're going to Indo-China."

"No. Just to Singapore," she said.

"Is this your first voyage?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You've got a job out there?"

She barely hesitated. She was pleased with herself, as though she were evoking a fine romance in which she would play a part.

"I'm going out to sell dresses."

"Is it a Paris dressmaker who's sending you?"

"No. My friend's arranged it all for me."

"The Russian?"

"He's a naturalised American. If he weren't, they wouldn't even let him land at Singapore. But he comes of a very good family, you know. All his family emigrated, at the time of the Revolution."

"Of course!"

"He's a dance-partner in restaurants."

"As good a profession as the next. But what about these dresses of yours?"

"Well, I was out of work, you know. Before that, I worked in the rue de la Paix."

"I see."

“We met one another. . . .”
 “So he came to France?”
 “Yes, just to see his father.”
 “That explains it. He’s a good-looking fellow. And you fell in love with him. . . .”
 “And he wanted to put me on my feet again. The English let you in, at Singapore, if your passport says you’re travelling in French fashions.”
 “That’s very nice of them.”
 “My friend knows a business-house in Marseilles, and they gave me a trunk with a little selection of models.”
 “All ready packed?”
 “Yes. How did you guess that? He told me for that matter, that it was just a make-believe. I shan’t sell much. But, once I’m on the spot, I can get a job as a manicurist at the restaurant where Léon is working. . . .”
 “And . . . you feel quite happy about it?”
 She recoiled a little. Our dance came to an end.
 “Why do you ask me that?” she murmured, turning out of the radius of the lamps with me. I went at it indirectly.
 “You’re very much in love with this Cossack of yours?”
 “Eh? Oh, yes! . . . What about it?”
 “You’re not afraid that he may belong to a . . . to a gang?”
 “What kind of gang?”
 “The kind of gang that gets girls out to Buenos Aires, for example,” I murmured.
 She started. She was shocked; but not in the way I expected.
 “Do you belong to the police?” she exclaimed—just like that acrobat-girl in Marseilles.
 “Do I look like it?”
 “I beg your pardon. . . . But then, how do you get such funny ideas into your head?”
 “It isn’t the truth?”
 “Léon! The very idea! . . .”
 She drummed on the rail, nervously. After a moment or two, she went on:
 “And besides, after all . . . suppose it were the truth?”
 “What? It wouldn’t make any difference to you?”
 “*I know he loves me,*” she declared, in a very low voice this time, credulous girl.
 “He hasn’t said anything to me yet, mind you. . . .”
 “So much the better.”
 “But, at the worst, he loves me. . . . I shall I always be his real wife. . . .”
 “Oh, very well!”
 “And no more about it now, see, or I’ll hop it. If Léon had heard us . . . it would have been terrible.”
 We fell silent. Then the poor filly went on, politely:
 “You’re in ‘first’ eh? Have you got some pretty partners up there?”
 “No better-looking than you, I shouldn’t think, if one took their jewellery off them.”
 “Flatterer! . . . So we get to Singapore tomorrow? Just imagine that I may be getting married there! . . .”
 “I hope you will,” said I. “A few years ago, Singapore was quite famous for the unexpected marriages that were decided on there. In fact, it’s quite a good story. . . .”
 “Oh, tell me all about it! And I’ll think that’s what’s going to happen to me. . . .”
 “Well, it was like this. . . .”

CHAPTER VII

SINGAPORE MARRIAGES, OLD-TIME AND TO-DAY

READER, do you know those Japanese gardens, with Lilliputian, real, living trees and dolls' houses, which they sell in Paris—and dear, too—and which you put on a table in your drawing-room?

Set a score of these nonsensical islets floating in the midst of a bowl of very greasy soup, underneath a canopy of yellow clouds; and you can imagine your arrival in Singapore harbour.

After that, you see the port: masts, chimneys, smoke, the blackish fronts of the docks, the grey barracks of business buildings. Even though you may perceive, here and there, a few bedraggled junks, queerly rigged, you say to yourself, sadly:

“Was it worth while to come all this way to the Far East, just to rediscover Liverpool or Hamburg?”

Take your time! The Arabian Nights are hidden away a little further off, behind those banks.

A Malay pilot takes us up to the quay, as I can testify; for I had gone up to the bridge to say good-bye to the captain, my old friend of three weeks.

It was that veteran of long voyages who had told me the tale—the charming tale—of “Singapore marriages” a quarter of a century and more ago.

“Yes, Monsieur, I was still an apprentice in those days. The call of the French mail-packet was always awaited at Singapore by a few leading Colonials of Indo-China.”

“Why didn't they stay at Saigon, without disturbing themselves?”

“It was the hey-day of theatrical touring companies. Colonial life was becoming civilised. It lent itself to amusements already. People wanted shows. The cinema, with its simple screen, didn't provide any as yet. So, inevitably, we used to carry theatrical and light opera companies.”

“In other words, pretty girls, leading ladies, Abigails, chorus-girls?”

“Just as you say. In those affluent days their growing wealth warmed the hearts of the bachelor Whites of Cochin-China, Cambodia, and Tonkin. They were short of White women. So they had no hesitation about coming to Singapore to stake out a pre-emptive claim for themselves, four days before the actresses disembarked.”¹

“And they went back to Saigon on board your ship, striking up acquaintance on the way?”

“They had four days in which to present themselves as the first attraction. Sometimes they did not find their ideal. Often they were repulsed and disappointed. But, at the worst, the little ones retained a friendly feeling for them out in the Colonies, as though they were godfathers. . . . And I've also seen, many a time, a friendship formed on ship board which afterwards led to a good marriage. That's really a very pleasant memory, you know. . . .”

“Wasn't that just what they had their eye on, all the time—a man in a good position?”

“Once the tour was over, instead of sailing for home again, the strolling actress, by the mere fact of her marriage, also became wedded to this great Indo-China of ours. I was invited to some of their weddings.”

¹ A distinguished Governor-General, a man with as fine a taste for beauty as he was a great Colonial organiser, is said to have sent his chief of staff “as a proxy.”

"They must have been pretty picturesque?"

"A regular cocktail. To begin with, the bride's fellow-actors and actresses: the heavy father, the duenna, the players of first, second, and third-rate parts. And then a contingent of backwoodsmen, friends of the husband, more or less smitten by the sun. They put in some hard drinking before the end of the marriage-feast."

"And how did they turn out—these marriages at a time when White women were still rare in Indo-China?"

"In general, they provided splendid proof of the adaptability of the Frenchwoman. For that matter, in high society in Hanoi, or on the big provincial estates, you'll still find a few Colonial great ladies: old but majestic, respected, feared! Guardians of traditions. Censors of morals. They lay down the fashionable law for the young women who are now so numerous. . . ."

"And they are these sometime chorus-girls and other strolling players of yours?"

"They are—transfigured after many years of brave battling, side by side with the planter or the official whom they've helped with all the resources of their feminine genius. The battle is won so far as they're concerned. They've only got to make up a triumphant character for themselves. . . ."

"And doubtless their old stage training comes in very useful, to give them the illusion that they were born princesses. . . . All honour to these matrons of yours! They're worth a lot more than many another aristocracy. . . ."

"And now, I suppose," I went on, "Frenchmen in Indo-China don't need to fight over White women any more? They can marry girls born and bred in Asia, or even girls from home who aren't afraid of exile. Nobody, I imagine, lies in wait for you at Singapore now, to carry off your passengers. . . ."

"Hum!" replied my good friend the captain "Hum! . . ."

"And what do you mean by that Malayan remark of yours?"

"I mean that, if I had a girl in my charge, I should keep a very close eye on her during the Singapore call."

"She'd be in danger?"

"I should say so! Worse danger than her predecessors. Other times, other games. The colour of the players has changed. As you said yourself, White women parade about Asia nowadays just as though they were at home. So the natives don't regard them as superhuman any more."

"Then it's natives who lie in wait for them?"

"Such things happen."

"Have you ever seen them happen, aboard your own ship? . . ."

The captain started.

"Aboard *my* ship? No, never! I should say not! I needn't tell you, I'd call in the Consul and start a fine row. . . ."

"But aboard other ships? Cargo steamers?"

"Maybe. On shore anyway. Perhaps I'm getting to be an old gas-bag. But I can't stand them, these new-style 'Singapore marriages.' "

Here we were alongside the quay. A hatch in the hull opened. Here were English policemen, wearing khaki shorts, poor chaps—doubtless to help them run better. Here, behind these bare knees, were fifty bare torsos, golden as amber. Coolies, coolies, who ever gave you leave to run away with our baggage? And here was a whole battalion of Wise Men of the East, in horn-rimmed glasses.

Some of them had lemon-coloured faces. Others were daubed with chocolate. All of them carried themselves well, in white duck coats or fine silk robes. Turbans; tar-

booshes with red tabs; the cackling of a farmyard gone mad, and the reek of an old hen-roost. No doubt about it. The steamer had not made any mistake about what ocean she was in. I had arrived in Asia.

I liked it, and I wanted more of it. So ashore with my baggage! Let me fill my nostrils with this smell of game gone high! . . . But first I had to manage my removal.

“Chief steward, my dear chief steward, lend me a hand! . . .”

“Wait here beside me,” he said. “I’ll look after you.”

He had to look after everybody else, too. In default of getting ashore yet, I used my eyes. The position was superlative. Nobody could get out of the ship, that enormous surprise-package, and nobody could get into her, without passing through the hands by this hatch.

Free passage for everybody, I supposed. But why, then, did my neighbour bar the way to two Chinamen?

“Wait there, if you please, gentlemen.”

Still, they were well-padded and paunchy, like men bursting with dollars. I recognised, though, that they had a nasty look about the eyes: half-beadle, half-butcher. Executioners, perhaps? Or simply hotel touts?

“They’re beaters for night-clubs,” Cerberus whispered to me.

They waited patiently. So did I. Bye and bye, out of the bowels of the ship ascended a delighted, even an intoxicated creature. She was the simple-minded shop-girl with whom I had danced in the third-class, the night of the fête.

She followed a coolie, who was carrying that famous dress-trunk of hers on his shoulder. But you might think her Cinderella or somebody else out of a fairy-tale, following a chamberlain who was at last taking her to the cathedral to wed her Prince Charming. If you could trust the evidence of your eyes, she was dazzled by landing in this enchanted Asia, where she counted on love and fortune.

She was walking by herself, entirely of her own free will. But suddenly I asked myself whether this coolie was not dragging her where she had to go, even more surely than if he held her by a chain. The same bare torso, the same flat face of yellow wood—for my part, I could never distinguish this coolie from any of the others. But then I am not a Chinaman.

The Chinamen held back at the hatch must certainly have recognised him for their part. Not that they displayed the least sign of interest. On the contrary, their slits of eyes were blinking. They looked as though they were falling asleep. Might not that be the Chinese way of being very wideawake?

Then, all at once, they seemed to be tired of waiting. What they had come here to find, they had now found—unless I was very much mistaken. In short, they turned on their rubber heels. As gay as a couple of undertaker’s men, they went down the gangway again. So my Parisian girl, following her coolie, was following them too, though she might not know it.

The chief steward nudged me.

“Did you see that?”

“See what?”

Then he looked at me in such a way that I could only nod assent, like a man who realises what it is all about.

“The pasha and the purser don’t know everything that goes on,” he murmured, to keep the moral record straight. (The “pasha”—or the “old man”—means, I need hardly say, the captain.)

“But where is the Russian?” I wondered.

I might have expected it: that clever rogue was not going to advertise his presence at the exit with the feminine game he had beaten up. Here he was coming along at a safe distance, and even provided with an alibi.

He owed his alibi to Mrs. Ho-Hing, the Siberian woman married to a Chinaman in Hong-Kong. He seemed to be lingering to say good-bye to this fellow countrywoman of his. Now, just before he got to the hatch, he was kissing her fingers. Every Russian is a perfect gentleman.

“Don’t you get yourself mixed up in this kind of business!” my good friend the chief steward warned me.

“Excuse me,” I said to him. “You can do what you like with my baggage. . . .”

And, ahead of Koltchak’s ex-officer, I dashed off the ship into the flood of humanity. All at once I felt that I must overtake the travelling saleswoman, and put her on her guard again.

Where had she gone?

CHAPTER VIII

SINGAPORE: WIDE-OPEN CITY—WITH WALLED GARDENS

TO set foot on the quay at Singapore is to let yourself in on the spot for a good deal of sweating and bewilderment.

There were parti-coloured gentlemen by the dozen, ranging from the wheedling half-breed soup-seller, common to all Asia, to pure high-caste Hindus. There were motor-cars, rickshaws dwarf circus-horses, and pack-horses, and even a dreaming elephant. (What was he dreaming about?)

But of my Parisian—not a trace!

I felt that a White lowered himself if he went afoot amid all these Lascars. So I hired a rickshaw.

“Gee up, my man-horse! Take me round the town. And don’t miss out the native quarters; for I don’t suppose conscripts of the Traffic are barracked right in the middle of the English city. . . . Go ahead, my friend!”

My friend, of course, could not make head or tail of it. But he burst out laughing and carried me off at a gallop, in accordance with the custom of his confraternity—straight in front of him. Nevertheless, when I shouted at him as soon as we got into streets of a civilised appearance, he ended by diagnosing my peculiar variety of madness. He proceeded, on his own account, to take me to the foulest of alleys.

To find a needle, threaded or not, in a haystack is, of course, merely a game, within the capacity of the dullest country policeman. But try to find a Frenchwoman in Singapore, if she has taken it into her head to go astray there—and you have got a job!

After a few miles I gave it up. I realised the special kind of mystery which these great cities of Southern Asia possess. It is not that everything about them is secret. On the contrary, everything about them is open—wide open.

The houses are called “compartments.” They have only one floor, and no fronts. They are simple pigeon-holes alongside the street. Three steps to the left of the pavement, and you are inside a townsman’s bedroom.

All life is lived in public. Here a barber clips his customers. Next door, a couple are getting married. Further on, a woman is having a baby. Her neighbour has just died. When it is a question of satisfying an entirely private necessity, the person concerned leaves his house and plants himself politely at the corner, just where the throng is thickest. Like that, he can be sure that nobody will invade his solitude.

Night tries to veil the naive indecency of the natives. Then these good people turn on all the lights they can, lest they should be driven not to live openly.

The shabbiest shop bedecks itself with a garland of electric bulbs. The porters carry lanterns or torches. Enormous Chinese characters and fiery dragons flame high up on scaffoldings. You can see as well as at noon. It is simply blinding.

But the extraordinary thing is that, by day as well as by night, this wide-open world remains fathomless to us Westerners.

The fact is that we are blinded. There is too much colour, too many faces, too much hubbub. This brand of mystery may be compared with the well-known procedure of cardsharps. They shuffle the cards under your very nose. In the end you can no longer distinguish any single one. Sun or kilowatts everywhere. Nothing in their hands, nothing up their sleeves; but still a wonderful muddle.

Such is all Southern Asia. The “Southern Round” was to prove like that.

Let the girl get lost if she liked! I vowed her to Vishnu. For my part, let me get back to the asphalt and the palatial hotels of my honest White brothers, the Britons. I wanted to breathe to eat something other than plague. . . .

“Go ahead, rickshawman, draught-boy, d’you hear me? Enough of rottenness in the dust for this evening. Quick, take me to that fine Raffles Hotel. It wasn’t called that after a gentleman-cracksman, but after an English Imperialist. . . . And that isn’t the same thing at all, mind you! . . .”

My trotting friend cocked a hilarious eye at me, over his shoulder on which the sweat shone. “These madmen in helmets,” he said to himself, “there’s no satisfying them!” Then he dashed off in the opposite direction, as though we were on our way to draw the first prize in a big lottery.

I got into a white dinner-jacket in high good humour. It was a gala night at Raffles.

Well, I know now why these gala nights end at eleven o’clock, with *God Save the King*, listened to on your feet.

Respectable subjects of His Majesty the King, who have come to dance with their families, take them back to their bungalows. After that, with clear consciences, they proceed to those “night clubs” about which I had already heard.

I got myself taken to them, of course. It was not to have a debauch. It was just to have a look. I was still in quest of my little fellow-countrywoman on the ship.

To tell the truth, I did not find her at the night clubs. But I found plenty of others like her. There were Australian girls, Polish girls, French girls. Pure Whites intermingling with Dutch-Javanese and Anglo-Chinese half-breeds. Only Russian girls were not there; the police will not let them stay. What a spectacle, my lords and gentlemen!

Singapore, that prudish city, is a jewel in the Colonial achievement of the Britons. Its night clubs calls themselves clandestine. To be sure, they were not wide-open. . . . There are walls, and even shutters.

But everybody in Singapore knows these establishments of mirth and jollity. They neighbour the Europe Hotel, and also a fine avenue with a pretty name: Orchard Road.

Their frequenters are mixed. Rich Malays and Chinese financiers dispute there among themselves for the company of dance-partners, singing girls, “taxi girls,” on an equal footing with their rivals, the White men. For that matter, most of the latter, so far as I could see, preferred to drink.

“Hullo,” I said to my guides, “a friendly sharing like this, under the triple English mantle of shame, racial pride, and religious Puritanism?”

“Just as it is, more or less, everywhere in the Far East. What a greenhorn you are!”

“I beg your pardon, but it’s just here that it specially scandalises me. I honour, admire chaste England. I should like her to be always in agreement in the Colonies with my own France. But the English have a long-standing mania. Whenever they can, they decry the French, and they accuse them, above all, of having a monopoly of vice. By way of compensation, where they colonise, virtue ought at least to be in fact triumphant.”

“You’ll see plenty of other places. . . .”

“And I was looking forward to discovering a relatively virginal Saigon!”

“You are quite right. Singapore is more hypocritical. . . . But you can amuse yourself here just as though it were a little Shanghai.”

“That speaks well for my investigation at Shanghai itself. So the hints I picked up on board my ship, the manoeuvres I thought I saw when a certain lady passenger went ashore—there’s nothing to surprise you in all this?”

“It’s already time-honoured to us.”

“What is likely to happen here to a travelling dressmaker, or a manicurist?”

“They’ll acclimatise her, to begin with. They won’t exhibit her right away. Come back to these love-nests of ours in a fortnight’s time. . . . Then you’ll probably see her figuring in the nude in post-midnight living-pictures. They’re pretty hot stuff.”

“But what about the French Consulate, watched over by that upright and well-informed man M. Ballereau?”

“She would be safe there, of course. But she won’t show herself there. If needs be, her hosts would stop her taking refuge there.”

“And the police?”

“The police can’t cope with everything. . . . Besides, we’re in Asia. Come on, let’s go somewhere else!”

We continued the local round of the Grand Dukes: dens, “boys,” drugs, monstrosities. And still more White women. . . . The whole bathed in a cloying odour of tropical decay. Here I was, baptised from the very first night.

In the course of a single evening in Singapore, in contact with the people concerned, I was able to appreciate the reality of this new traffic which attracts an unexpected clientele of Western women towards the East, *and towards Orientals*.

The “Road to Shanghai.” There was such a thing. This time here I was, right in the middle of it!

PART II

The “Southern Round”

CHAPTER IX

WITH THE COLONIALS, FROM MALAYA TO INDO-CHINA

SOMETIMES, on the films, they have to indicate the lapse of a period of time, in between two episodes. Then they show you a calendar, with its leaves fluttering off.

That's just what we need here, a calendar like that. You left me at Singapore. You pick me up again at Saigon, after covering some thousands of miles in Malaya, in the Dutch Indies, in Siam, and finally, up and down, backwards and forwards, all over French Indo-China, which is a magnificent country.

In short, I had now completed the "Southern Round" in Asia. I had been able to form a personal opinion about a good many things. Notably, while I was studying other matters, I pursued almost everywhere my investigation into the interest which the modern "Coloured gentlemen" are taking in women of the White race.

Do not, indeed, take it from this book that, face to face with the marvellous Far East and its masterpieces of European colonisation, I concerned myself solely with prostitutes. Far from it. In the Asiatic fairyland I found plenty of other things to think about. And I met actresses who play nobler and more important roles.

But neither do I look down on prostitutes, as the hypocrite does. I do not by any means say to myself: "They are the rank grass, beneath contempt, which grows—in the streets—at the foot of palaces."

I believe that they are a potent element of evolution along that Road to Shanghai where I met them. If they are "at the foot of palaces," I would compare them instead, poor innocents, to dynamite which may blow everything sky-high.

So I am surely, and even very seriously, contributing to the efforts of the friends of peace all over the world, when I make known to you the truth as I saw it. This book of mine is not meant as a joke. Make no mistake about that. . . .

The truth as I saw it? Here it is.

First, being introduced by good god-fathers into the countries which I visited, I had the exceptional honour of being received at all the native courts, of sultans, royal or imperial, which still exist.

People also took care to initiate me everywhere into the red-light districts, houses of pleasure, cabarets, *yoshivaras* and other flower-baskets, just as though I were going to become a professional guide for foreigners there afterwards. My godfathers were really very good to me!

In consequence, I got a close-up of *women of Colour*, in that two-fold élite which best represents all femininity: princesses and courtesans. I saw lots of them. I even. . . . But let us get on.

Well, I thought things over thoroughly, afterwards. I exerted myself, I swear to you, to purge myself of all racial prejudice and, if I may venture to say so, all narrow-mindedness. I believe that I reached the point of being able to judge just as a man, in accordance with the most universal of aesthetics.

May the princesses and courtesans, Yellow or olive, forgive me! This feminine élite of Southern Asia and the islands struck me as still extremely uncivilised, by comparison with White women.

I can sum up what they lack in one word. What they lack is *personality*.

Out of one hundred European or American women of different origin, I maintain that there will always be at least thirty who possess *character*. This means that in the

game of life, and in the game of love, they are intellectually, and *in consequence physically*, partners either prepossessing, or enticing, or at least *interesting*.

Among us French, a proverb accuses pretty women of being brainless. It is a calumny, which must have been invented by ugly creatures. In reality, the supreme secret of the beauty of White women is harmony, the balance which radiates from inside to outside, from mind to body.

Very rare are our beauties in whom does not flower at least coquetry, that form of intelligence which is semi-professional and capable of anything. They possess charm, even if they are not particularly intellectual. Centuries of relative emancipation have given them this privilege over against males. They are all great-grand-nieces of Celimene. And, in fact, Frenchwomen have the highest percentage, if you are looking for charmers.

On the other hand, out of all the hundreds of Coloured great ladies and little pretty ladies whom I ventured, shameless Parisian that I am, to scrutinise and question from Colombo to Manilla and Hué (as I had done earlier in Africa and as I did later in Peking and even in Tokio), *not one*—I repeat it, *not one*—aroused in me that complete, that reverent admiration which is awakened in every one of us by a woman who is, at one and the same time, gracious and aloof, well brought-up and *free*, quick-witted and high-minded.

I didn't understand them, you may tell me. Of course I did. I should inevitably have understood any such pre-eminence on their part if they had possessed it. And I arrived convinced in advance that they did; for, from Chateaubriand to my dear friend Benoit, our novelists and our poets of exoticism had lulled me with the legend of Atala and Antinea.

You know how one goes about it. First of all, in your spare time as a civil servant, you write a book singing the praises of some irresistible seductress, Yellow or Black. Then you get some royalties for it, and with them you can at last take a trip and see whether it really is like that. . . .

The legend, therefore, is nothing more than a legend. Women of Colour *cannot*, up to the present, *give their true measure*. They bear the marks of an age-old heritage as slaves. Even if they are on the morrow of their freeing, they have not yet had time to *become intellectually adult*.

I noticed a good number of them, to be sure, who would rejoice the senses of sight and touch of any man worthy of the name, for the duration of a penance which would be a very sweet one. They were nice little animals. They might have left their brains in the cloak-room. You would not miss them.

Others of them, on the contrary, were ugly, and even very ugly. The art of making natural imperfection at least "piquant" is utterly unknown to them, you may take my word for it. But, out of their hideous masks, these ugly ones looked at me with such sorrowful humanity that I guessed them already conscious of their misfortune, their ignorance, as though it were an imprisonment. I would have liked to be able to deliver them, to enlighten them . . . so long as I had not to touch them.

To sum up, the entire collection of these exotic Venuses is far from equalling in "sex appeal" the figure, the face, the genius for finery and make-up, the gift of the gab and the poise of any simple little Parisian courtesan.

She has personality. That is precisely the point. The value of her body is multiplied a hundred-fold by all that she manages to suggest around her. The proof of this is that, when she complains about a lover, what she says is: "He doesn't understand me. He only loves my body . . ."

Women of Colour, at this present period of ours, *are simply bodies*. It is not their fault. It is the existing stage of evolution of their races which has limited them in this way. But what is now undeniable, to my mind, is that they are inferior to White women at the judgment-bar of masculinity.

And White women are superior to them.

That is the first truth.

Secondly, I have found that the Coloured races themselves, in increasing number, recognise this superiority of the Western Venus.

Throughout the East, the women of Colour who are widest-awake disguise themselves, to the best of their ability, as “imitation-Whites.” Rouged cheeks, waved hair, European dress and ways. Clearly they think that, by doing so, they will please their males more.

Whenever they feel entitled to do so, these males manifest their curiosity about White women, or even, quite unmistakably, their preference for them. You have only to ask our Colonial women how much furtive or frank homage they receive—and, of course, generally repulse.

One of the most typical cases is that of the crown prince of one of the sultanates in Java. This handsome, olive-tinted young man was educated in Europe. He also achieved some flattering conquests there. All homage is not repulsed either! . . . Now, back in his paternal harem amid betel-chewing girls as brown and puny as poor little mice, the prince is visibly wasting away as he longs for his fine blondes built to Rubens’s measure. He is homesick for them; he is bored to death. Out in the Sonda islands, he is, so to speak, a neo-romantic grand-nephew of Werther von Goethe.

The Coloured men have discovered White women; they prefer them; and they summon them.

That is the second truth.

And so, undoubtedly, the result is a “traffic.” These worthy Coloured men have also learnt from us the infernal power of banknotes. They have their coffers bursting with them. They address themselves to Anglo-Saxon agents, generally, who negotiate the buying and selling of all kinds of merchandise for them.

“Please, Mr. Brown, can you get me a ‘White madame’?”

“Yes, sir, all right!”

The imperturbable middleman transmits the order. The only thing is that he avoids asking for a respectable English or American girl. He suggests, instead, the dispatch of a French girl: depraved, in his eyes, from birth.

So, especially from Paris, in the opposite direction to the Road to Buenos Aires, is traced the quite new Road to the Far East, the Road to Shanghai.

This route of prostitution is, no doubt, not yet so frequented as the American one. Those who pass along it, as yet, are fewer. But *it exists*. Women do pass along it; and their number is growing. For the appeal—a “sex-appeal,” if ever there was one—swells in volume, proclaimed in the “pidgin” and all the other dialects of the Asiatic Babel.

“Numba one plopa piecee lady. . . . White madame. . . . Wit mevrouw. . . . *Französe Damzelle* . . . *Madame blanche!*”

This formula is now everywhere understood. It is, for that matter, the refrain of the whisperings which assail the traveller, once he goes for a walk alone at night in any of the big cities on the Southern Round.

Forthwith ill-favoured fellows suggest local prostitutes to him, at the cheapest possible rate. Half-breeds come dearer. Then, as a supreme temptation, a high-priced morsel, they vaunt him that rarity: a White woman. There is always at least one. . . .

“What, here, in these backwoods of yours? You’re trying to pull my leg, you think you can put something over on me, my brave bully, my priceless pimp of the Tropics!”

“Yes, Sahib, *ya Tuan*. . . . White, *Blanche*, Parisian. . . .”

“It’s not possible, you liar. Let me have a look at her.”

And it is true! There is at least one, often a very lamentable one, with little bloom left; but still White, with the pigmentation of the West, a perished White woman of the ideal clay—oh, miracle!

I could tell many a tale of exploration in hot, swarming shadows. Sometimes the thing is simple. In Bangkok, for example, Siberian and other prostitutes at the service of the Siamese are parked all along one avenue, in rather dubious tavern dance-halls: “Rose Hall,” “Mumm’s,” “International Café” . . . Sometimes chauffeurs, cab-drivers, rickshaw-runners, beggars or even shrewd urchins take you wandering through thieves’ dens before you find the bamboo shack where a poor prostitute awaits custom, like a spider in its web. It is like this in Batavia, Bandoung, Solo and Djokdja, important Javanese cities which, nevertheless, are monuments to Dutch colonising genius.

Sourabaya, until the slump, was better: an equatorial version of Cythera and Montmartre, with Moulin-Rouge and modern sanitation. As for French Indo-China, far from setting a bad example in debauchery, as is so often said, it is, instead, to-day relatively a model of discretion. Saigon “the voluptuous” is, in reality, innocence itself. If Indo-China is no exception to the rule on the “Round,” neither does it constitute any particular stain on it.

So, everywhere the presence of White women for hire: I bear witness to the fact. They must have got there somehow. *A White Slave traffic exists*. Through what chain of intermediaries? That is harder to say than on the American route, by virtue of the strangeness, the complexity, the mystery in which everything is involved in Asia.

I thought about this particularly one night, when I was sitting in the rue Catinat, in Saigon, outside the very French café of the Hotel Continental.

CHAPTER X

THE NEW SAIGON “PROFESSIONALS”: RUNNERS, “BOYS” AND MALABARS

THERE were three of us at the Continental’s café, and we were consuming iced drinks.

“Here’s the blonde coming back. Throw your stick in between the spokes of her rickshaw for her!” said the captain.

“Throw your own sword!” retorted the planter.

It was the hour when tigers start prowling after prey in the jungle: about eleven o’clock at night.

In the rue Catinat, the tigresses numbered scarcely half a dozen. They must certainly have been ready to bite us with rage, because we had been watching them parading up and down in their rickshaws without even waving a handkerchief at them.

But life had given them a hard schooling, those poor little European women! They knew very well that nowhere can you catch your prey, man, except with a smile. So they smiled at Saigon, at money or the Devil himself, as they revolved from the cathedral to the river-bank, and from the river-bank back to the cathedral, up and down that famous street, in between shut shops, deserted pavements, and lights already dimmed.

Their two-footed team ran silently: rubber tyres and bare feet. They queened it, all ready, but all alone. So they appeared, in the stretch of the street brilliantly lit by our café terrace and by the cinema where they were showing *Latin Quarter*; and then reappeared; and finally disappeared, until to-morrow.

“Hunting hours are over, in accordance with the law of the jungle,” I ventured.

“In accordance with police regulations, you mean,” the captain corrected me. He added: “It used to be a joke of our elders: ‘Rue Catinat? . . . Two letters too many.’¹ It’s very quiet and provincial nowadays, isn’t it? Before the slump you would have seen thirty women instead of half a dozen, and all of them in their own cars.”

“Nowadays,” the planter supplemented, in disgust, “you might as well be buried in the provinces in our beloved homeland.”

“Excuse me,” I questioned, “but what has happened to the other twenty-four?”

“What other twenty-four?”

“The twenty-four who made up the thirty, together with the half-dozen we have just seen.”

“Gone back to France. . . .”

“Or, more likely, married to Annamites, out in the bush.”

“You don’t really mean that?”

“Why not? It’s quite normal. Including more than one of our top-notch ones, who used to be kept in villas by Colonials who have gone bust now. We’re feeling the draught, we chaps who wear helmets. It’s ‘Hell, fellow!’ instead of ‘Well met!’ when it comes to paying bills. So they’ve fallen back on the people who’ve still got money to spend.”

“The Yellows? So they really like White women?”

“They do, indeed. Especially those who’ve been students at our universities, or those who’ve served as soldiers in our home garrisons.”

“It’s also largely a question with them of just being in the fashion, isn’t it?”

¹ *Catin* = Trull. (Translator’s Note.)

"Just being in the fashion or not, it's these Asiatics who are saving masculine honour! And they provide these little pretty ladies with a living, in our place. Paul, did you see that? The blonde got a bite, after all."

"At that fat Cholon rice-broker sitting at the corner table?"

"Yes: a pure Cochin-Chinaman. He didn't dare to signal to her, because we were here. But he's just sent a runner after her."

A score of men-cabs were gathered like overgrown mosquitoes round the doors of the cinema. They waited for custom squatted between the shafts of their rickshaws, gaping and chewing at pellets of opium.

"Gentlemen," said I, "I find your runners brainier fellows than those in Singapore."

"That's one result of the broad-mindedness of French colonising methods. You get the kind of servants you deserve."

"When I first landed in Asia," I went on, "it embarrassed me to be drawn about by worthy fellow-humans. I've lost that Western scruple by now. The more so because I find that all of them are traffickers in women. So I've stopped looking upon them as martyrs."

"Martyrs? Just look at them! They're as happy as fish in water."

"After all," I went on, "here in the rue Catinat they serve the same purpose as what we call fellows in the 'profession' in the place Pigalle in Paris. But they're Yellow, and they do their pimping on behalf of White women. . . . And often to the advantage of other Yellows, I suppose?"

"Inevitably, the 'profession' here is native, even though we can pride ourselves on a few thoroughgoing scoundrels from Marseilles. It isn't for nothing that our rue Catinat is called a continuation of the Cannebière! But in Indo-China a European woman of easy virtue can find a lodging only among the Annamites. Her hairdresser is Yellow. She has a 'boy,' predestined to become a pimp."

"So it ceases to be simply a 'profession'? It becomes a club, a family party."

"She gets used to the colour of them, and the smell of them. After that, finding customers among them is simply, in her eyes, supplying a demand."

"Yes, I see," I murmured. "And these mixed . . . love-affairs—how do they work out?"

"You'd better ask the people concerned."

"Do you really want to know?" asked the captain. He was getting a bit merry. "We'll fish up some samples for you. Hey, runners!"

More than half a dozen of them jumped to their feet and rushed upon the triumvirate of us. They all started whispering:

"Pretty Annamite? Half-breed madame? French madame—husband gone into bush, much pretty, not much dear?"

"Disgusting!" exclaimed the planter, who was a married man. "You're not going to have them brought to us right here in the café, I suppose?"

"No. Let's go up to your bedroom," the captain said to me. "You're just a visitor."

"What? In this respectable hotel?"

"Two French madames," ordered the captain. "D'you hear me, Cupids? One brunette, and one blonde. First-class ones, too. And quick about it. . . ."

The dozen or so wrangled like a covey of crows. Then two of them set off, at record-breaking speed, one to the right, and the other to the left.

"Nothing more to worry about. Let's go on up," said the organiser.

I was sleeping in an annexe to the hotel. It was quite close, and we went there on foot. All at once I stopped in the middle of the pavement.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I'd like to make quite sure that I'm really in agreement with you about one essential point."

"What is it?"

"It's this. Gentlemen, I have already met, all over the place, French colonial women—I mean the real ones. . . ."

"Yes, quite so," said the married man. "You mean the kind of ones we marry, or might marry. . . ."

"Rich and poor," I added. "Even the poor ones. . . . Elsewhere than in Indo-China, *ninety-nine out of a hundred of them strike me as quite irreproachable women*. Here, I'm quite sure it's the same thing. But would you mind assuring me that it is?"

They chorused with one accord, the bachelor together with his friend:

"Frenchwomen in Indo-China? Why, they're simply splendid?"

"And God alone knows how much they've been slandered!"

"That's just why I pressed the point," I went on. "I know them myself, believe me. I have had occasion to admire those of them who entertain in the big residencies, as well as those who brave fever in outposts in the bush. And I'm sure that, at this very moment, there are some of them, nuns and lay nurses, sitting up with Professor Le Roy des Barres's cancer patients or in leper colonies. There are some who simply do their duty as wives and mothers, despite climate, hard time, and home-sickness. There are women archaeologists working at Angkor, and women diplomats helping their husbands to govern two or three million natives. . . . I know them all. Let nobody ever accuse me of maligning them!"

My two companions offered me their hands, and I could tell they were touched by what I had said. We French are for ever talking nonsense; but that doesn't prevent us from being fair.

"You wield a pen," said the planter. "You ought to write a book in defence of our Colonial women."

"If you did," added the captain, "you could celebrate their work in Indo-China, ever since the heroic period of Poivre and La Grandière."

"It would make a great epic, indeed. I may tell you, gentlemen, that I'm thinking of doing it. I shouldn't lose any time about it, if I were sure I had the talent for it. . . . So, to make no mistake, these poor hungry tigresses in the rue Catinat, these 'French madames' whom you told the runners to get for us, don't manage, by their mere proximity, to tarnish the shining merits of the real Frenchwomen of Asia."

"For that matter, they're not such criminals themselves, the tigresses in question. They make a living as best they can. . . ."

"Let us forgive them the more, because we may be sure they would rather have loved the less. . . ."

"And now let's hurry up, or they'll get to your room before us."

A few moments later the hall-porter of the annexe, one of those Hindus nicknamed "Malabars" by the Indo-Chinese, received us with a deep bow.

CHAPTER XI

A FRIGHTFUL, UNFORGOTTEN ROW!

“WE might have addressed ourselves to the Malabar,” my friends remarked. “That son of the Indies is bound to have rather higher-class connections than the runner-coolies.”

The porter in question was a well-mannered, bearded fellow, wearing a turban and a saffron frock-coat. His complexion was a fine plum colour. He belonged to the great corporation of Asiatic night-watchmen. As a matter of fact, traffic in women is generally an adjunct to this worthy profession of theirs.

We went up the outside staircase. There was not a breath of air; it was a sultry Saigon night. On every landing a naked “boy” was asleep on the matting.

“The ‘boys’ could have got us the ladies too,” said the captain and the planter. “In any case, both ‘boys’ and Malabar will see that they get their commission. . . . Hi, wake up, Kai! Drinks and some ice.”

We waited under my electric fan. The married man pursued our earlier train of thought.

“Now that, very properly, we have sung the praises of the true Colonial women—our irreproachable Frenchwomen of Indo-China, our wives—we may admit that they, too, can feel the modern evolution of the Yellows with regard to the White woman.”

“Even if it is only among their own servants,” added the officer.

“Several of them told me that they felt hemmed in,” I murmured.

“Exactly. They are studied, spied upon watched, in accordance with the old Asiatic habit of tale-telling, and also in accordance with a quite new *sexual curiosity*.”

“So they are careful not to let their ‘boys’ see them in their intimate life, as some of them used to do with indifference.”

The captain pulled at his moustache. He decided to take us into his confidence.

“This watch that is kept by the natives,” he said by way of preamble, “is one of the reasons why little lapses from strict virtue—adultery, for example—are rare here, even on really excusable occasions.”

“Are you implying that you have been an excusable occasion yourself?”

“Well . . . yes, if you like. It has happened to me.”

“Go ahead. There are some husbands who deserve their fate.”

“Well, I was enjoying a victory won by dint of patience; and it was only our second rendezvous. We thought we were well hidden, out of the knowledge of the whole of Indo-China, in a retreat of ours which I had chosen as carefully as a site for a block-house.”

“And what happened?”

“There was a knock at the door. It was my Annamite orderly. He had come to tell me that I was wanted at headquarters.”

“And you hadn’t told him where this hiding-place of yours was?”

“No. And he knew it, on my very second visit!”

“Everything gets known, and at once. Asia is a wonderful spy,” said the planter.

“Hullo, somebody’s knocking at the door,” I cried.

It was only the Hindu porter: the Malabar.

He wanted to make himself useful. Smug-lipped, he told me that two ladies were downstairs.

“Let them up, *Missiè*?”

"Of course, you old blackguard!" exclaimed the captain. "No, wait a minute! I want to ask you something."

He caught hold of the Malabar by his fine, gold-fringed sash. Then he turned to me.

"Faithful champion of our Colonial women, don't be scandalised! This is only an innocent joke. . . ."

He went on, to the Hindu: "You know everything, too. Tell us what that pretty Madame X. does when her husband embraces her."

He mentioned the name of a very well-known woman, in high society. The Malabar nearly split his sides laughing, though his laugh was deferent enough towards us.

"She goes: 'houi, houi! . . .'"

"And pretty Madame Z.? . . ."

"She goes: 'rrou, rrou! . . .'"

"I may add that this information has been verified," my friend added, rather sheepishly. We laughed, of course.

"Still," said I, "it isn't any the less grotesque, any the less annoying and distressing, in fact, that Asia should listen to Europe, even to the point of sounds in a bedroom."

"Yellow or White, we're all human," said the planter, rather shame-faced himself.

"Here's a piastre for you, Mohamed," said the captain, in his parade-ground voice. "But if ever I catch you repeating rude remarks like that, I'll cut your head off. Understand? Get out!"

The Malabar got out. We had a drink. After a moment or two the two girls who had been announced presented themselves.

Their eyes were heavy, for they did not belong to the sextette we had seen parading. They had been wakened up. They were clandestine prostitutes who stayed at home till they were summoned.

Since then the police have prohibited soliciting in the rue Catinat. So only such clandestine prostitutes as these survive. Saigon is almost pure and French Indo-China is vowed to virtue, whereas all the rest of non-French Asia is, on the contrary, awakening more and more to worship of the white Venus. . . . But let me return to my two visitors. I must stick to the truth, and I ask your pardon if this tale shocks you.

One of them was, indeed, a brunette, and the other a blonde. The brunette had the face of a Madonna on top of the barrel which served her for a body. She kept her cape on prudently.

The blonde, whose cheeks were pitted with smallpox, was proud of her breasts. She exposed them to us as soon as she came in, just as you raise your hat in salutation. They were, indeed, prepossessing. The mosquitoes, anophelae and other culicids which were buzzing gaily about the room steered straight, in squadrons, upon this feast of pink-and-white flesh. The girl let them bite her, contemptuously.

"I've got their beastly malaria already, and that's all about it."

The "boy" who was bringing refreshments gazed at this. He tittered with mirth over it. But it was an Asiatic titter: a silent one. The spectacle of those stings must have excited the susceptible young man.

"Good health!" said the brunette, raising her glass. "I'm a Corsican, if you want to know."

"And I'm a Parisian," said the blonde. After all, well as they were standing the stings, she gave her breasts a shake to drive away a few of the mosquitoes. "Let me tell you, gentlemen, that my mother was a concierge in Les Batignolles."

She went on to say that she had grown up, and lost her illusions, in the very street where I live in Paris. Really, is it worth while travelling?

"But," the daughter of Ajaccio pointed out, "there are three of you, and only two of us."

"It doesn't matter," said the captain. "It wasn't for *that* we mobilised you."

"Then why did you? Just when we were having a rest with some pals of ours. . . ."

"It's this gentleman," said the planter, "who wants to ask you how things go with the Annamites, so that he can write it in his books."

"Not at all!" I protested, too late. "My object isn't anything so rude."

It took them a moment or two to grasp it; and, unfortunately, what they grasped was the simplifying formula against which I had protested.

"Such an idea!" pronounced the girl from Les Batignolles. "As though all the fellows we have to amuse weren't every one just as much of a nuisance as the next! . . . If you ask me, from what I know of the Annamites, they're just as *standardised* as anybody else. For our part, we do what we have to do, you know, and do it as well as we can."

She was a good girl, that one. But the Corsican took the thing in bad part on the spot. Probably there was a typhoon roving towards Cape Saint-Jacques, and she was suffering from rasped nerves in consequence.

"What! What's all this?" she screeched. "D'you mean to say you've got me out of bed just to talk about filthy things like that? What do you suppose they're like, our clients here? Would it annoy you to know that they had repeating rifles that were better than yours?"

And, in default of any handier weapon, she flung my fly-tox pistol furiously through my mosquito-net. Its rotten framework collapsed.

No woodwork lasts in the charming climate of Saigon!

The Parisian girl lost her temper too, just to show her solidarity with her colleague. Awakened neighbours banged on the walls. . . . This is alas, a true tale. I'm sure they still remember it at the Continental, to my shame, innocent though I really was.

"I'm a married man," murmured the planter "I'm off." "

"For my part," said I—I was extremely annoyed by this scandal—"I'm starting for Laos by air at six o'clock in the morning. I'd like to get a couple of hours' sleep."

"Meet me at Cholon, at Suzanne's," cried the captain, making his way to the door. "Any rickshaw-runner will take you there. . . ."

Left alone with the two raging nymphs, I spent a few difficult moments. The Corsican swore she had friends in the management, and she didn't give a damn about turning the hotel upside down. Happily the frightful row brought the "boys" and the Malabar running. It was they who got these harpies to shut up. So I had a proof that they really belonged to the "profession."

Incidentally, I was minus my mosquito-net. I also felt rather wrath with the comrades who had got me into this mess and left me in it. I rejected the idea of going and meeting them at Cholon. The rendezvous was at a well-known procuress's, a half-breed of English and Chinese blood. She, too, sold White women to Yellows with no qualm of conscience. Another night I was present at an auction at her place, and it was the White fancier who withdrew first.

I lay down fully dressed on my rumpled bed. Before my early awakening I had a nightmare, orchestrated by the gnats. I dreamed that I was rolling on and on in a rickshaw across vast, splendid Indo-China. Sententious in my sleep, as I admired the bridges, the roads, the modern cities, the whole enormous labour of civilisation lav-

ished upon this Asia by the heroism of my fellow-countrymen, I cried out in my dream:

“Colonials, you have built these marvels. Bravo! But, after all, are they here just so that a girl from my own neighbourhood of Clichy may lend her breasts to the mosquitoes? Is trafficking of White women among the Yellows, then, the ideal for which you have striven? Is this to be the definite, the final result of all the blood that has been shed, of the epic of French Colonial women, of all the old-established European colonisation in the Far East?”

“No, no! You are dreaming.” Luckily, those great French leaders whom I had met at their jobs everywhere, and whom I hold in affection, came out of their residencies to answer me. “If there is a new Colonial peril of a sexual kind we shall know how to meet it, as we have met many another.”

The rickshaw rolled on. . . . You, too, you Phaeton-Bucephalus, ought to have your little epic couplet! And finally I came out of that nightmare.

For that matter, my henceforth tranquil snooze might have lasted as far as Hanoi. It is there that you will meet me again, one evening at dusk, propelled by another man-motor.

CHAPTER XII

LOLOTTE PRESENTS ME TO MICHEL SCARFACE

HANOI, capital of Tonkin—here we are. It is at the other end of that extraordinary ribbon of road which Frenchmen—duly seasoned and ironclad against fear, I need not tell you—have unrolled through marsh, forest, dysentery, fever and bandits.

They call it “the Mandarins’ Road” out of politeness to the Mandarins, who could never have made anything like it. You can drive along it in a car at fifty miles an hour. Sleeping-car coaches run along it. Palatial hotels mark every stage-point. My fellow-countrymen, salute it! This fine piece of work is ours.

Here we are, then, at Hanoi, that very worthy city. I spent some months there studying, at its administrative heart, the working of that remarkable machine of progress, French Indo-China. My fellow-countrymen, salute once more. It is a great machine. It does us honour. And, as a whole, it is mightily well policed.

Here, living in shirt-sleeved hard work, I saw the Viceroy of the French Republic, Governor-General Pasquier—his job is no sinecure, nor is it without its dangers; the higher Residents, Châtel, Graffeuil, Lavit, Pagès, Tholance, real leaders of men, imbued with humanity in their strength; and many another, down to the humblest pioneers of my great France.

The distinguished Director of Political Affairs—a euphemism which means the Grand Mandarin of the Police—was at that time M. Lacombe. We went on some rather picturesque excursions together.

The policing of Tonkin in particular—twenty-three provinces—was the no light burden which devolved on M. Arnoux. He had plenty to keep him occupied, believe me. For the Chinese frontier runs to the north, from Kwang-Tung to Yunnan. Still, he preserved the smile of a Buddha. He was a conscientious man, and also a man who enjoyed life.

We talked women. I am quite sure that he defended them to the best of his ability, even the sinners. But—unless he were really Buddha—how could he hermetically seal more than six hundred miles of Chinese frontier in the depths of the jungle, not to speak of the sea-coast?

For that matter, as all sociologists bear witness, a woman bent on “going her own way” is capable of slipping through the eye of a needle. And there, obviously, the slimmest of policemen cannot follow her.

So I let myself be charioteered again at a spanking trot by one of those two-footed comrades who, in Hanoi just the same as in Saigon or Singapore, unanimously suggest to you:

“Half-breed madame? French madame?”

This time it was I who told him:

“Take me to Lolotte’s.”

He sped there without hesitation, through the midst of the violet-brown swarm of the Tonkinese city. I loved those little chubby, bedaubed people chirping and spitting betel-juice amid their little houses of ochre earth and lacquered wood. A mist was falling, just as though we were in Brittany. A French trumpet sounded “Cook-house door” in the distance. And here was the railway viaduct.

Lolotte lived in a low, unassuming house. To begin with, “boys” inspected me through the peep-hole of the door, just as though it were the entrance to an American

“speakeasy.” But I was known. An influential customer had stood godfather to me here. In empty hours of his workaday, worldly life, this was his *buen retiro*, his humble retreat. For he came here to dream, to love, to smoke. . . . A dilettantism, for that matter, which is exceptional among the modern Frenchmen of Indo-China.

“Madame engaged,” protested a servant with the intelligent mug of a moon-struck child, after opening the door to me.

“I have an appointment.”

He opened his somnambulist’s eyes and ushered me into a little drawing-room, furnished as though it were in Belleville. Those who had to wait here could browse over a fine collection of Payot’s monographs about the war at sea: the jetsam of some naval officer lover.

Through a party-wall I could make out the tired voice of a woman—the voice of a Frenchwoman. She was saying:

“So, Madame Lolotte, you think it can be arranged?”

“Certainly,” replied another voice, hoarse and contemptuous. “I do, little one. He’s a very rich Annamite. Come back to-morrow at the same time.”

The outside door closed. Then Lolotte in person appeared in the doorway, holding on to the jamb. You may imagine her as like our Maud Loty, but stained walnut-brown.

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” she said, with an air of utter fatigue. “Come into the smoking-room. I’ve been out for some time, and I haven’t had my proper number of pipes.”

“You’ve asked this fellow of yours to meet me?”

“He’ll be here at any moment.”

We went into the sanctuary, furnished with the classic mats and a few pagoda accessories. A snakey Tonkinese woman in a tight black silk dress was there. She was already heating the first pellet of opium over a little lamp, which left everything around us in shadow. Lolotte lay down and inhaled, as though she were really drinking a vital fluid. Her assistant offered me a pipe, too, but I refused it. I am not an opium-smoker.

“How many pipes have you got to now?” I asked.

“A hundred pipes a day.”

“It’s a terrible habit.”

“Yes. . . . Recently I went for a journey by car. I miscalculated the supply I took with me; and there was not way of getting any in the villages. I went for twenty-four hours without any. My chauffeur ‘boy’ gave me what pellets he had. But, after that, he didn’t know what he was doing at the steering-wheel himself. I don’t know how we didn’t pitch over a precipice.”

“Did you go far?”

“To the Gate of China.”

She gulped down another mouthful. I was opposite her on the hard matting, and the smoke with its scent of almonds enveloped me too. I called up the “Gate of China” in my mind. First, Langson: yesterday a battlefield, to-day a flowery city under our protectorate. Then, fourteen kilometres away, Dong-Dang, the Customs post; and the real Gate, an arch leading to the Chinese frontier post. The Gate set in a stretch of Great Wall, which straddles spurs of hills covered with brushwood: a perfect stage-setting for a Jules Verne novel, adapted for the Châtelet. All around, undergrowth ideal for smugglers and bandits. Saint-Ouen at three o’clock in the morning is much less dangerous than this frontier at high noon.

“What on earth were you doing up there, my dear Lolotte?”

She went on smoking, without answering me. But her mask of a fat, kind-hearted half-breed, transfigured by the genie of opium, assumed a rather maleficent expression. She ceased to resemble a European. At this moment her Asiatic heredity came uppermost. She reminded me of those statues of demons which protect the entrance to temples in China. Poor Lolotte—what a picture I am painting of her!

“Another deal in women?” I persisted.

“A hundred pipes,” she replied, “is quite a moderate amount, you know. Did you ever meet old M., who used to be a journalist like yourself, at Hanoi? He had to have a hundred and forty. And still they say that his articles finished off two Governors-General.”

“A creditable result. But as a rule, Lolotte, opium makes Whites incapable of sustained effort.”

“And they’re no good for anything with their wives any more,” she murmured. “They cease to be jealous, even. On the contrary, it amuses them to see other men making love to their wives.”

“And what about Annamites, Chinese, Yellows in general?”

“They remain men, in spite of opium. When they want to get hold of a White woman, they try first of all to teach her to smoke, with or without her husband.”

“The more so because the drug arouses feminine sensuality, contrary to its effect on males of my race?”

Lolotte nodded and smiled.

“Yes, that’s just it.”

“Have you known many White women who smoked?”

“Only ones who came to the colony without being seriously in love with anybody,” this expert diagnosed. “They get bored, they’re unhappy. It’s they who ask me, who beseech me for it. . . . For my part, I never force it on anybody.”

“Just now, you were talking to a Frenchwoman. Is she a smoker? Or does she just need a few piastres?”

“Both. She came to me to smoke at first because she wasn’t in love with her lover. He was a factory representative in Haiphong. The slump ruined him. He went home. She’s stayed behind, because now she loves smoking.”

“I’ve heard of that kind of thing before.”

“But she hasn’t any money now to pay for good opium. For my part, I can’t sell Benares or Yunnan at less than a half-piastre the pipe. So I’m trying to put her in the way of making the money she needs. As for curing her, it’s hopeless. She’s sick, she’s thin, and Frenchmen don’t want her any more. . . .”

“Not a nice tale, Lolotte.”

“It’s you White men’s fault, too. You bring women here; and then you don’t know how to keep them.”

At this moment, three rings of the bells broke the ritual silence of the house. Lolotte—hyper-sensitive—jumped as though they were thunder-claps.

“Is this he?”

“Yes, I expect so.”

I sat up, quite excited. For, thanks to Lolotte, for the first time I was going to meet, in my own professional capacity, one of the professionals of the “Road to Shanghai.” Hitherto, all my information had been due to chance. To-day, it was an appointment. It was an interview.

I had barely stirred before he was already with us, unannounced. He came in as though he were in his own home, walking in freely and easily—in order to show me

his power right from the start, I imagined. He looked for me in the half-dark, frowning. Then he smiled and introduced himself, like an indulgent wild beast.

"I'm Michel—commonly known as Scarface."

"I see why. How d'you do? Will you have a drink?"

He kept on looking at me rather askance.

"Nothing alcoholic. I've got to mind my liver."

Then he sat down and gave me the key-note, with somewhat stern benevolence.

"We know already what you're interested in, here in Indo-China. In Saigon, a little one messed your furniture about a bit."

"That is so."

"Well, Monsieur, be more careful in future. Always explain yourself first, lest there should be any misunderstanding. It will be better. Otherwise, above all with Corsicans, the same thing might happen to you as happened to me."

"A scar?"

"Yes, and I was lucky, too. My enemy marked me with a knife. It's healed. If he'd had a cut at me with the rough edge of a bit of sugar—what they call the 'cow's cross'—in this climate my cheek would still be suppurating to this very day, ever since 1928."

He leant obligingly nearer to the lamp, to let me have a good view of the purplish scars, crosswise, which decorated his handsome workman's face. But for his too fleshy jowls and his receding forehead, he would have been like one of those gallant young fellows who stormed the King's Bastille on a certain Fourteenth of July.

"I'm a Parisian," he said. "The other man, as it happened, was a Corsican. I suffered this punishment through a piece of sheer bravado. For I had already paid him an indemnity of two thousand piastres, twenty thousand francs, just because of a whim of his regular woman's. . . ."

"Tell me all about it," I begged.

CHAPTER XIII

ALL THE FAR EAST, SEEN FROM A FINE VIEW-POINT

OUR hostess was now at her fifteenth pipe. Michel Scarface drank a mouthful of lemonade.

“Well, it was like this,” he began. “I’m talking to you about days when things were brighter. The slump interrupted all that. At that time there were at least forty of us running the business in the Far East.”

“What? Then the White Slave traffic out here isn’t so new, after all. You must have had quite a number of rowers, if there were forty of you in the admiral’s galley.”

“Anyway, there were Corsicans, such as you meet in the rue Fontaine in Paris. Marseillais, whose rallying-point there is the faubourg Montmartre. And Parisians like myself, kept supplied with fresh flowers rather from the faubourgs Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin.”

“Three threads attaching you to the very navel of France! And I suppose, according to the custom of all our fellow-countrymen abroad, you had your quarrels among the different groups of you?”

“No, Monsieur, quarrels were rare. My scar was due to an exceptional occasion. I was young, and I was reckless. The more so because I possessed a remarkable woman. And I was very fond of her. But I took her out to work in Manilla. Then I came back to Saigon, to await a further consignment. However far we may roam about our business, to us Frenchmen Indo-China always remains the place to which we come back for a rest and a good time, under the national flag.”

“It’s your *alma mater*, eh? Michel, you’re a man with your heart in the right place.”

He bowed.

“So I was doing myself proud, and that often leads to trouble. This Corsican comrade of mine was hooked up with a girl from Normandy. An odd match. She was a hard-working girl, though. He kept her at it in the rue Catinat; but he would have done better to send her out into the bush, even if she had brought him in less money. For she was given to fancies, like the one she took to me. Well, he found out about it, and demanded a reckoning from me, in proper course, in the presence of arbiters. I admitted my liability. I paid him two thousand piastres. The moral harm I had done him was worth that much. So that ought to have been the end of the whole business. But one evening I had been drinking, and the typhoon was hovering off the coast. I bragged about starting all over again! He heard about it that very night. And the next day he put his mark on me, with the whole Ajaccio group for witnesses, as I was coming out of the Hotel Dieppe.”¹

“That’s behind the theatre, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Monsieur. At that time it was our headquarters, and we were, indeed, nicknamed ‘the Men at the Dieppe.’ Even as far away as Australia, or in the depths of the Indies or in China, it was a reference that stood you in very good stead. Just imagine, I myself had women working for me, in one and the same season, in Sourabaya, in Hong-Kong, in Shanghai, and in Tientsin! . . .”

“This hotel of yours certainly commanded a wide horizon.”

¹ A perfectly respectable hotel, as a matter of fact. If it happened to shelter a few guests in a class of their own, naturally they did not put down their profession as bullies in the visitors’ book. In any case, this is all a matter of the past.

"I took any number of different currencies to the money-changer. Everywhere she went, the Frenchwoman, the Parisian woman—for even the Marseillaises, accent and all, called themselves Parisians to make an impression on their clients— everywhere she was a triumph. One Frenchwoman was appreciated as much as twenty Austrians."

"A flattering privilege! But isn't it like that still?"

"So far as we are allowed to hold our own, Monsieur. Still, competition has got clever. People imitate us, and they calumniate us. Even if the present great slump came to an end, I don't expect to see any return of the fine years when I was starting: 1919 to 1925 especially, the backwash of the war."

"Were you mobilised for war service in the Far East?"

"Mobilised in the service of a little mistress of mine, which was rather more pleasant. She was vegetating in *cafés-chantants* in France. An agency came along and proposed that she should join a certain M. Romajul, who was organising a tour in Asia. On account of the war, all the Colonial centres were still without shows. This gap to be filled struck this man Romajul. . . ."

"I heard about him in Java," I remarked.

"That's the chap. He was touring at the time in Indo-China, with his own woman and three other artistes already. His success set him looking for fresh turns. My mistress wanted to go. 'I'm starving to death here,' she kept on saying. 'I might just as well do it among savages.' But she didn't like venturing all by herself. She said to me: 'If you'll come and look after me, I'll go.' So we embarked."

"And you discovered Peru."

"Indo-China, to be more exact. We shared in Romajul's good luck. He went and established a Moulin-Rouge in Sourabaya, among the rich Dutchmen. It was a fine idea. He had to have as many as eighteen dancing girls. He put on revues. After the show, people went to his nightclub, the Tabarin. The extras went very well. It was my turn to write to Paris to have a few girls sent out to me."

"The era of the fat kine, indeed. . . . But did your . . . your clientele consist mostly of Whites?"

"Of course it did, so long as they had any money. At that period, since Colonials were always buzzing round them, our girls would have given a fine snub to any Yellow bold enough to make advances to them. Short of some really fantastic present, of course. Still, the difficulty only served to spur on some of the very richest. I can assure you that as early as then several Sultan's sons in Java acquired a taste for European women. But they had to pay bagsful of florins for them. And talk about Madras, in British India! I always had a correspondent there, who was an agent for Rajahs. The women I sent him simply spent some time in what corresponds to a harem in that country. I never had any trouble, and I was royally paid. All my fillies came back. But I knew of one, belonging to the stable of a comrade of mine, who was never returned to him. And he couldn't kick up too much row or her life might have been in danger."

"Was the poor girl dead? Or had she become a Sultana?"

"It's a mystery, Monsieur."

"Such are the risks of the profession," I remarked.

Michel Scar face deigned to laugh. Lolotte, lying flat and motionless, was digesting her opium.

"Nowadays every man of Colour wants to have a try with a White woman," she pronounced, from the depths of her serenity. "He wants to have a try, even if only for the purpose of spitting at them and saying that they make him sick."

"I've never wanted to make my profits in that direction," Michel went on. "In my opinion, it does colonisation too much harm. How can the natives respect us, afterwards? And believe me, it hasn't been the fault of our Frenchwomen—I mean even those of them who 'go the rounds' out here. People say that our fellow-countrywomen, of all White women, will go the most indifferently with men of any race. I maintain that it's false."

"And you ought to know."

"They have their natural common-sense, and they know very well that you've got to keep up prestige where natives are concerned. But what can you expect them to do, nowadays? The flood's up, and the barriers are down. No more dollars or piastres, anywhere else except in the purses of all these Chinamen. Ah, Monsieur, the proudest of creatures will reconcile herself to queer doings, you know, when she sees her dinner being dangled before her nose like that, so to speak."

"I like your way of putting it, Scarface."

"Some of them," he added, "have simply refused to have anything to do with Yellows. They've gone home, fourth-class. Or else they've let themselves be killed sooner."

"Such heroines as all that?"

"I can quote you the case of Jeannot, a French girl who was working at Hanoi in '26 or '27. She had such strength of character that the rickshaw-runners nicknamed her 'Madame Ong Kopp.' "

"And Ong Kopp means Mr. Tiger."

"Exactly. If they gave a woman a name like that she must have broken more than one sunshade across their backs. She died in the Lanessan Hospital. It was poison I'm quite sure. And the reason? A big *tong-doc*, a Tonkinese provincial mandarin, had waved his handkerchief at her. And she replied by insulting him."

"Carrying tigerishness a bit too far. . . ."

"She paid for it with her life. But plenty of others have 'lost face' and given in at the very first invitation. Besides, any number found themselves badly pinched by the slump. I didn't finish the story of Romajul's outfit. In May '31, that fine manager felt the monsoon blowing against him. Perhaps he saved what he could . . . for himself. He told his troupe that he was going to look for credit. He took ship, and he's never been seen since."

"A pity," said I. "If he were here, I should like to hear what he had to say."

"They must have told you at the French Consulate in Batavia, Monsieur, what a pickle the French singing and dancing girls of the Moulin-Rouge in Sourabaya were left in. I managed to throw a lifebuoy to one of them and repatriate her to Saigon, where I was looking after her sister. But most of them inevitably became the spoils of the Javanese at knock-out prices."

"A touring company overseas often ends up in a shipwreck like that."

"Quite true. But you see how useful it is, in such cases, for the unlucky girls to be able to call upon the help of a man to whom they owed their prosperity in happier circumstances."

"Your words are golden, Michel."

"My words are bank-notes. If they hadn't got any left, we still had. I do my duty towards my lambs, when I have to."

"Even when they're strayed?"

"Alas in 1930 the old Dieppe bunch started changing hands, and changing its ways, too. It didn't consist of the same stout fellows as at the start any more. . . . Some of them had made their fortunes. Others gave up, tired of the climate or else

scenting the slump. The police force underwent a change, too. Officials who had been familiar with us for years and knew that they could always appeal to our better nature at a pinch were replaced by new ones. Besides, there had been some blunders, and even some scandals in our set which certainly justified stern measures. You've heard about Mado's album?"

"No. . . . What album?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE GATES OF CHINA OPEN TO WHITE WOMEN

SCARFACE'S scar seemed to me, in the shadows of that opium-den, to have become enormous. He went on:

"They say that the administration is going to be even more strict with us in Indo-China henceforth. There's talk about M. Pasquier's having made up his mind to get us all expelled. Well, Monsieur, I must admit it would be only fair, even though I haven't deserved it myself. You have to stick together in a profession. For my part, I haven't very much with which to reproach myself. But Mado, for example. . . ."

"She started in 1927," interposed Lolotte, as she began a fresh pipe.

"Yes. And she had brains, that woman. But she didn't realise just what she was doing. At the beginning, she helped lovers to meet. Nothing criminal about that, in itself. Then she really ran a regular brothel. That's still admissible, isn't it, so long as no violence is done to anybody?"

"Just what I've always said," Lolotte approved.

"But here's what came next. Mado had not failed to notice the turn of mind of certain Annamites. They imagined that, with their piastres, they could buy any White woman they wanted. A childish idea, Monsieur; but, instead of undeceiving them, Mado bestirred herself to play up to their illusions. Through her own 'boys' and through runners, she bribed the servants of the highest families in the colony. She paid these idiots to steal, out of every drawing-room, photographs of pretty Frenchwomen, young married women or girls, all of them perfectly respectable. With these photos she filled her album. Then she showed it to European new arrivals, and, above all, to her simple-minded Yellow clients. And she boasted that she could provide anybody they chose in it!"

"What an abominable outrage!"

"I quite agree, Monsieur, and I would have told her so myself; but she never consulted me. For that matter, of course, she used it only as a bluff. The credulous Annamite or Chinese paid a fat sum down in advance. Then Mado kept on putting him off on all kinds of pretexts. In the end, she flung into his arms one of our common prostitutes, either trusting to darkness as a disguise, or else pretending that the girl was a friend of hers belonging to a respectable family."

"Revolting!" I exclaimed, despite my professionally thick skin.

"Wasn't it, Monsieur? Just think what undeserved contempt for White women it gave those fools of natives! But the pitcher can go to the well once too often. . . . One night Mado, whose business was prospering, was visited by some young flying officers. They drank and stood her drinks, and she showed them this fake album of hers. Some of them just laughed, without thinking. But all at once the decentest of the bunch turned pale, clutched the album, and cried: 'It can't be!' He was the son of a general, commanding a division in Indo-China; and he recognised a photo of his own sister."

"Oh, I say!"

"As you may imagine he took the whole collection straight to his father, who called in the police. It was hushed up. Mado was expelled from the colony. But the worst of the harm was already done. She became a legend among the Asiatics whom she had deceived. It sometimes happens that Lolotte here is told: 'You haven't got a good connection. Mme Mado could manage to get first-class Frenchwomen.' "

"Quite true," confirmed Lolotte.¹

Michel Scarface was now well away. He went on eloquently:

"The police, for their part, haven't always been free from blame themselves. I'm talking about the under-officers, who are Yellows. A number of them, I regret to say, have taken advantage of their jobs in order to gratify an unhealthy curiosity about White women. That they should pick up a bit of information from our 'boys,' in the same way as in any other country, would be normal enough. But their particular hobby is getting their men, who are Annamites too, to provide them with reports about the private lives of European ladies. What can the men do? They inform themselves through the 'boys,' and even through the runners in the street. . . ."

"Always those runners!"

"The runner doesn't mean any harm. But you know how his mind works. If he takes a White man a couple of times to a villa where he knows a lady lives, he jumps to the conclusion that she is her visitor's mistress. You can imagine from that what the tone of the reports is like. The French inspectors don't know anything about it, or don't pay any attention if they do. But these reports circulate among the native element in the administration. Some of its members just pretend to believe in them. Others take these revelations for Gospel truth. The result is the propagation of an erroneous idea. . . ."

"We ought to take the higher education of the runner-coolies in hand, just to protect the good name of our Colonial women!"

"It would be a help," Michel agreed, quite seriously. "I must confess to you, Monsieur, that, during the hey-day of the Men at the Dieppe, we were a little to blame ourselves for this lack of respect on the part of the runners. But that, again, was the result of the police making a nuisance of themselves."

"They wouldn't leave you alone enough?"

"It all depended, just as it does in barracks. Since we never knew where we stood, we and our girls avoided meeting in public. So the runner inevitably served as our intermediary. He was a confidential agent of the business."

"That didn't do him any good."

Scarface shook his head.

"Now that such a number of White women have come out to the colonies, and now that all these ideas have been crammed into the natives' skulls, it was inevitable that the natives should end by becoming mixed up in our kind of business, as clients and even as bullies. That's why I don't fancy the business very much any more, for my part. If I agreed to come and meet you, and if I'm talking to you as frankly as all this, it's just because I'm on the point of giving up my position. I want to retire."

"At your age? And will your successors be as good as yourself?"

"No, without being conceited, I don't believe they will. Though what may prove the best thing, mind you, to bring the two races together is the half-breeds. They sometimes defend the interests of the Whites better than we do ourselves, just because they're so proud of possessing a drop of European blood. Just consider our friend Lolotte and people like her. If you ask me, it's their turn that's coming. I hand my succession over to them."

"Many thanks," growled Lolotte, still smoking. "You're leaving me Hanoi, which isn't worth anything any more. For your own part, you'll go and get fat in China."

¹ If I rescue this incident from oblivion, despite the disgust which it aroused in me, it is because no other could better illustrate *the new colonial problem of a sexual kind*. The Mother Country ought to know all about this problem, so that she should not refuse her representatives the necessary authority to protect White women when necessary.

The gentleman with the scar burst out laughing and got up, evidently thinking he had given himself away enough.

"Just a moment," said I. "One more question. It happens to be about China. About all those 'Gates of China' which throw the northern frontier of Tonkin open towards Kwang-Si and elsewhere."

Lolotte listened. Michel squared his chest.

"Go ahead," he said imperturbably.

"Well," I began, "the other evening I dined at the military flying officers' mess at Bac-Mai. They're a fine lot. The excellent Governor-Mayor of Hanoi, M. Guilman, was there."

"I know him," murmured Michel, with a little bow.

"They told me the story of Auclair and Barona. They were two young officers, as brave and reckless as their comrades. One day, at dawn, they set off in their Breguet XIV machine for a routine flight. They had to make a forced landing. The frontier isn't marked on the ground as it is on the map. They came down, injured but alive, in China. Kwang-Si peasants hurried up. Barona was stoned and drowned. Auclair was handed over to a gang of bandits, and suffered weeks of agony before our intelligence service got on the track of him and negotiated his ransoming."

"Yes, that's what happened."

"From the Mao-Son observatory, I've myself seen that region of the 'Ten Thousand Mountains': wild hills, rugged as the skin of enormous wild beasts! I've listened to stories told by the chiefs of military posts who hold that country of savages and murderers for us. To the west, from Lao-Kai, I went up in three days to Yunnan-Fu, by that excellent French railway, some of whose employees are periodically carried off or killed. Then I've been about a bit on the high plateaux—splendid but sinister panoramas of barbarous Asia. . . ."

"Quite so, quite so."

"I've questioned M. Patou, who was the prisoner of a tribe for quite a long time . . . and other witnesses, familiar even with the very depths of China, Szechuen and Kwei-Chow. May I quote you, with all respect, Scarface, that heroic traveller for the faith, Monseigneur de Guébriant?"

"I know him, too," he declared, with a deeper bow.

"So I have a fairly good idea of what extends, of what swarms *ad infinitum*, beyond this peaceful French Indo-China of ours. Cities or backwoods, all of it isn't exactly a nunnery, or even a love-nest. . . ."

"Scarcely so, indeed."

"The Cantonese prefects or *tukyuns* who claim to govern there are merely boasting. Their mercenary soldiers are former and future brigands. Nobody there is sure of not being flayed alive on the spot, in just so much time as it takes the executioner to remove a human skin. . . ."

"That's becoming rare. But it still happens. You're quite right, Monsieur."

"Such is the race which walks on two feet, in those delightful lands where cholera succeeds famine, and where the smell even of palaces reminds you of a highly seasoned dunghill. Well, Lolotte and Michel, I've been told something, on very good authority. . . . And it's so disconcerting that I can't believe it."

The two of them stayed stiff and silent.

"I've been told," I persisted, "that, despite all the vigilance of the Governor-General, of the Residents, of the chiefs of military posts and their subordinates, it sometimes happens that women, White women, Frenchwomen, guilelessly pass

through those 'Gates' to go and lose themselves amid that ultra-feudal barbarism. . . . Just as though they were crossing the River Plate, from Montevideo to Buenos Aires."

Michel turned aside. Lolotte shrugged her shoulders.

"Well? Our hostess happened to be telling me just now about a trip she made to Dong-Dang, the nearest 'Gate' to Hanoi."

"If you're on friendly terms with missionaries," said Scarface, rather artfully, "ask them what they know about it. Nobody is better informed than they are about what goes on in the interior of China."

I got annoyed.

"No, no, tell me yourselves! You're here, and you're no missionaries. My question might well rile a saint! What harm does it do you to answer me this one question—after all the rest you've told me?"

"What harm, indeed? Well, if you ask me, such things may happen," Michel admitted.

He scratched his scar, and went on, of his own accord:

"Still, if anybody has led you to imagine smuggling out through ravines, with the woman hidden in a carrying-chair. . . . In my opinion, that's all sheer romancing. It would be quite unnecessary. I see two means *which must have served the purpose*."

"What are they?"

"To Yunnan, the railway. It brings plenty of opium back, despite all the inspection! Passports haven't been insisted upon at Lao-Kai until quite lately. You can get one from a policeman. . . . Besides, suppose a Chinaman from Mong-Choo or elsewhere wants to treat a French lady to a little trip in his neighbourhood. She just gets into the train! And she comes back at the end of a month. . . ."

"Or never. First means. And the second?"

"From Langson and Dong-Dang, for a long time back, there's been a motor-bus service to Lang-Choo and Tai-Ping-Fu. Your colleagues, Messieurs Tharaud, concerned themselves about it in connection with the kidnapping of a consul in '25."

"The bus is inspected at the frontier."

"And the frontier-post is held by the Foreign Legion. Fine soldiers, Monsieur, the Legionaries."

"I should say they are."

"But smart fellows, too, and with an eye for a girl. In their eyes, China's no Hell. If they see that a girl has taken it into her head to slip over there, why should they worry about her, I ask you?"

It was my turn to stay silent.

"So such adventures strike you as quite ordinary," I said, in the end. "They're beyond anything I should ever have thought possible."

"*Anything* is possible in China," replied Scarface, while Lolotte laughed, rather nastily. "But the train, the bus, the land frontier—after all, it's not so very easy. Just you have a look at the coast, Monsieur, and the ships—the coasting ships. . . ."

"That's the very next thing I'll do."

CHAPTER XV

BEHIND THE BARS OF A HAI-NAN COASTER

THE Indo-China coasting traffic—I had a fine experience of it!

Every three minutes the fog-bell rang, tunelessly. The pigs packed into hampers in the bow answered it with almost human cries.

There were also on board Pak-hoi quails, caught alive by lantern-light; and edible snakes destined for Hong-Kong, cooped in vermouth crates with their mouths sewn up. There was a whole tribe of Chinese coolies, a good number of them bedded in the open air on top of the pigs, and the rest in any hole or corner they could find, down to the depths of the hold. In addition to the Annamite crew, there were the French captain, mate and engineer, and a few cabin passengers like myself.

The stout little ship *Kai-Ching* cradled all this on the dark water. A night of thick cotton-wood hemmed her in. The fog rose as high as the mastheads and defied our lights everywhere, a boathook's length away. We swung there like the pendulum of a clock. With the engines stopped and at anchor, of course. And not feeling any too happy; for these waters between the Loo-Chow peninsula and the island of Hai-Nan are cluttered with reefs, not to speak of pirates.

"But there aren't any more pirates, are there?" I asked the mate. Not feeling much like sleeping, I was putting in my time pacing the bridge with him.

"I beg your pardon," the old shellback replied, "they simply swarm from here to Bias Bay. To occupy themselves, as a rule, they have their fishing. But, if you're unlucky enough to run on a reef, they smell you out at once and board you in their sampans, with muskets crammed with small-shot, and sometimes even with good rifles. In such cases it's usual for your coolie deck passengers to go over to the enemy at once. You're attacked both from outside and from on board. I've seen it myself. That was at the beginning of my time in Chinese waters. Since then it hasn't happened again, so far as I've been concerned myself. But I know comrades of mine on whom the same trick has been played quite recently. That's why we navigate inside a cage, in this castle of ours."

He tested the solidity of the bars which armoured everything amidships with a regular menagerie grating. The wheel-house and the engine-room were protected by sheets of cast-iron. In the case of this cage, Chinese style, contrary to Pezon's or Hagenbeck's system, the good public stayed inside, and the wild beasts sported outside.

"And very nice too!" said I. "If we're the beneficiaries of any such boon to-night, I suppose we sell our lives as dearly as possible?"

"Tut, tut, don't get excited!" growled grey moustache. "This is China. We'll fire on them if we have to. But they'll give us plenty of time to talk terms first."

"When you have any lady passengers on board, what happens to them?"

The rogue dug me in the ribs.

"Then we're in luck! We sacrifice them to save the rest."

"I can't see you making terms like that. You're too much of a ladies' man yourself. Besides, do Chinese pirates appreciate any such offering?"

"Do they? Look here, I'll tell you a true story. I used to know a man in the mail-packet *Hanoi*: a Bordelais named Roubérac. He was a nice fat fellow, a regular little dumpling. We buried him at the age of sixty-four. Well, when he was over fifty he was sailing in a coaster like this one of ours: the *Hong-Kien*. He had a mistress, the wife of a Belgian, a merchant at Kowloon. I don't know how she managed it, but

anyway she came to Haiphong during one of Roubérac's leaves. Then, when her husband's tolerance was exhausted, she re-embarked for home, on board her lover's own ship."

"The ship of dreams . . ."

"They ran into bad weather as soon as they got out of the river. They had a nasty time of it trying to keep a course, and finally they were driven ashore in a creek of the Chinese coast, where nobody ever went. They were short of provisions, and they needed help to stop the leak. Anyway, the natives didn't seem aggressive. Not that French money was of much use to them. Some of them came on board. They let it be understood that their mandarin would provide anything that was needed, if the White woman would pay him a visit."

"You don't really mean that?"

"Roubérac told other people besides myself. Mind you, there wasn't any argument about it. Whether she was scared or not, the Belgian woman went on shore. She stayed there three days. What exactly happened to her was never found out. She was certainly the first of her race who ever showed herself in that land of devils. I really believe that they just looked her all over, for fun, and no more. They kept their word. The *Hong-Kien* was re-victualled and refloated. When she moored at Kowloon, however, the husband proved a bit impatient. He had got wind of the truth, and he divorced the lady. It didn't happen so very long ago. You can inquire about it at Hong-Kong."

"I'll take your word for it," said I. "But it sets me thinking. . . . Do you know many more stories like that?"

"No, that's the only one. But, if all the European women who've gone through my hands on board these little cargo-ships were here now and prepared to talk to you, you'd hear still more surprising things from them about the Yellows."

"Do you get many White women passengers?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"No matter what voyage, two or three of them, and without their legitimate companions, too. I suppose it's the climate that makes them blossom forth like that."

"Some of them are perfectly virtuous."

"Quite a number. But still, you'll notice this: wives of officials who are shifting from one post to another travel either ahead of their husbands, or after them. They seem to make a special point of not travelling with them."

"That may be for reasons of convenience in moving, or from a quite innocent desire to have a little time to themselves. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt. . . . On the other hand, do you see many who are unmistakably giddy? Travellers in free love?"

"Prostitutes, you mean? Yes, we get them, too, of course. You're bound to get them."

I told him the tale of my discoveries. He burst out laughing.

"Is that all you found out? You might have done better than that. To begin with, the traffic organised from Marseilles hardly touches Indo-China any more, nor is it run in the mail-packets. The passage money is prohibitive. And at Saigon, nowadays, the police won't let unmarried girls land, unless they can deposit the price of their repatriation."

"True, my alleged dressmaker only went as far as Singapore."

"There, the English are the same as everywhere else: strict, but blind. Once I'd mislaid my passport, just when I wanted to get it *visé*. I boldly pulled an old tailor's bill, with a receipt stamp on it, out of my note-case. I laid it in front of the chief pass-

port officer. Good enough. The old red-tape merchant stamped it as an official document: 'Valid for landing.' In a British colony, nothing is tolerated; but you can do anything. You'll see, at Hong-Kong. For that matter, if people bother nowadays about introducing girls into Indo-China, they'd certainly take them round that way. And so they would those destined for China, which is the real market."

"What? Do you mean to say that if a fancier in Hanoi gets a girl sent out to him she'd start by going on to Hong-Kong, several days at sea further off?"

"Yes, because she'd have bought a comfortable berth at Marseilles, for three thousand francs, on a Japanese mail-packet. At Hong-Kong she'd find all the facilities of a free port. Thence she'd re-embark in one of our coasters, or in another Jap ship, for Haiphong. There she'd get round the police veto either by claiming that she was a transient, or thanks to somebody who said that she was in his service as a secretary. But, I tell you again, it isn't Indo-China any more that attracts the newcomers, the latest conscripts. . . . With the way the slump has upset everything, there are plenty there as it is. Hell, there've been some nasty doings! Have you ever heard of the *chettys*!"

"The Annamite moneylenders?"

"Cursed Yellow usurers, worse than all our Jews put together. They've managed to get a good number of Whites into their grip, and sometimes a White woman a bit too adventurous, without her husband knowing anything about it. When that imprudent lady's notes of hand can't be renewed any more, what does the good little *chetty*, still polite and smiling, suggest by way of avoiding any scandal? A meeting with an old Chinese banker—very well brought up, of course. . . ."

"That may happen an odd time," said I, sceptical and disgusted. "But surely it can't happen very often!"

Suddenly, below us, one of the tied pigs broke into cries still more abominable than usual—probably because it had been thumped in his sleep by some coolie in a nightmare. My companion crossed over the bridge, to administer a laconic rebuke to the mess of men and beasts which the lamps barely illuminated. Then silence fell again.

I shook myself, as though I were trying to get rid of a strapping of warm, sticky damp. The persistent fog shone in all directions. The helmsman rang our bell. And what if this melancholy sound of warning, for the sake of sparing us a most unlikely collision, should awaken and summon the Hai-Nan pirates . . . since they still existed?

I tried to make myself forgetful of the present. I fell back upon that great event of the century: the initiation of the Coloured peoples into the extraordinary charm of the White Venus.

The sailor was considering the same idea in his own way. He came back to me, and said:

"As lately as before the war, the Annamites thought their own prostitution dens luxurious. You didn't pay for the *congaie*; you paid for a *candle*. As it burnt, it marked the time during which you had a right to amuse yourself. They've got more refined since then. Have you questioned any of them?"

"I had some very interesting conversations with the young princes at the Court at Hué," I replied. "They certainly had their eyes on White women. . . ."

"By the way, you ought to stay for a little at Che-Kam, in our concession of Kwang-Chow-Wan, where we call to-morrow."

"As a matter of fact, I've been to Che-Kam already. That frontier town of French China struck me, indeed, as a very remarkable place. To begin with, thanks to the administration of that first-rate governor-mayor, M. Vayssières, it's a miracle of coloni-

sation. Cholera is stamped out. The streets are kept clear of any refuse. There, as elsewhere, our Colonials have made a very good job of it."

"Quite true. But, from another point of view, the gaming-houses at Che-Kam, what with fan-tan, mah-jong, and Chinese roulette, are almost as notorious as those of Macao. There are Chinese restaurants with troupes of singing girls in the best Cantonese style. That's why the independent generals of Kwang-Tung go there to spend the booty they've taken in their victories. When they're beaten, they go into retreat there, too."

"I know. At the French town-hall I've seen a list of ex-governors, vice-governors, prefects, intendants and minor Chinese dignitaries who have taken shelter there—not without a few pickings—behind our gallant sentries. And I've run through Che-Kam by night, faster than suited me, but enough to be able to guess at the pleasures with which it swarms. But they didn't show me anything but Yellow courtesans. . . ."

"They're the fixed contingent, the troupe in garrison. And some very nice ones, too! Nowadays they dress and make themselves up just like European women. But, as for half-breed women, or even pure White women, French and Australian—how many haven't we taken to Fort-Bayard, and picked up again afterwards! Especially at one time, when a once prominent Frenchman had retired there with a government job. He used to carouse with Chinese friends of his. He was as violent as he was large-hearted; a Colonial great lord—and a long-bearded patriarch! Yes, you ought to go ashore at Che-Kam."

"I'll have another look at the place. But it's Hong-Kong that tickles my fancy, after the glimpses you've given me. . . ."

"Hong-Kong and Canton—great cities for love! . . ."

CHAPTER XVI

HONG-KONG: YELLOW SLAVES—SOMETIMES HALF-WHITE

I HAD been in Hong-Kong for some time, and I was devoting myself to my most serious occupation, which consisted in strolling about the Chinese streets.

When the action of a film is supposed to take place in China, the director makes up a highly coloured setting in the studio, with fine carven houses and streamers and lanterns in great profusion. In it he sets in motion figures elegantly clad in silk.

The real China is nowhere like this. It is drab, plain and poor. I know only one place in Asia which achieves the cleanliness, the style, and the gaiety of that pseudo-China of the cinema. It is in English territory. It is China Town in Hong-Kong.

Despite the stench of it, I am very fond of the authentic China. But I confess that this clean, sleeked, cheery setting under British control appealed to me enormously too. By day as well as by night, I was oblivious of time there.

On this occasion it was getting dusk, and all the lights were being lit.

"*Vivi li Frenchi, Missi!*" the voice of a starved eunuch suddenly cried behind me.

I whipped round, with my hand to my note case, from force of habit. A kind of larva was smiling at me affectionately and giving me a military salute. It was a man, for he was wearing a duck jacket which had once been white. He had a brown cap and black gloves—the latter intended to hide some mark of leprosy, I imagine. As for his face, it was made up of deliquescent bones, sunken eyes, and grapeous glands: the whole held together by an old skin which the term *papier maché* describes to the life. He was probably under fifty. But he was at least a centenarian by right of beggary and infirmity. And still a cheerful soul, with a hold on life such as people have only in China.

We knew one another already from an earlier meeting. How had we met? According to him, we were half fellow-countrymen. He claimed to be the half-breed offspring of a Frenchman—and an officer, if you please!—and a Chinese woman. If they wanted to produce an argument against the mixture of races, his parents had made no mistake about him. Hence, however, the exclamation by which, in the Auvergnat French jargon of Hong-Kong, he intended to convey to me: "Monsieur, my dear distant cousin, hurrah for France, our common mother!"¹

After my first inevitable feeling of nausea, I got used to his dreadful appearance again, and I expressed my delight at our meeting.

"So there you are, my friend! I was looking for you. You've turned up just at the right time."

He smiled, touched, proud, eager, like a poor angel not only fallen, but also rotten; and it wasn't his fault.

"Ivories, very cheap," he suggested. "Jades piecee number one, *Missi*. . . . Me know merchant. . . ."

"No, I don't want to buy anything."

He executed a quarter turn on his bare feet, with a shuffle. It was his way of changing his motley. Since there was nothing for the ear of the jewel-broker, he lent me the ear of the pimp.

"Pretty Chinese ladies, Sing-Song, cabarets West Point?"

¹ He went so far as to claim that he had been a manservant in the service of the Governor of Indo-China, Van Vollenhoven.

“Yes, it’s not for nothing that you have French blood in you, my good friend. It’s women that interest us. . . . I see you understand me.”

Delighted, he wriggled inside his duds, like a worm.

“But no Sing-Song. Don’t you offer me any more of your suppers for tourists, this time. . . .”

In the course of an earlier trip, I had met him just at the moment when four friends of mine, French officials, had called upon me, in my capacity as a writer, to organise a “local colour” evening for them. The conscientious spectre in the black gloves had conducted us on the spot to a highly respectable tea-house. Then, setting off a-hunting, he sent us from one minute to the next such a number of Yellow minxes, bespectacled and short-haired, that the sheer abundance of them left my quartette too disgusted to make a choice. So we fled, as good as we had come!

Now, having found him again, I formulated for his benefit, in his own “pidgin,” the two ideas which I had in my head. I need not say that they were chaste, serious ideas, inspired by purely humanitarian motives.

“Take me see some *mui-tsai*,” I told him first.

He turned up his nose—that nose of his which, alas, was nothing but a hole in his face. He seemed saddened, though ready to obey. I suppose he thought me too aristocratic for what I demanded—that wretched rabble of pleasure in Hong-Kong. I went on to my second question, at the other extreme.

“You know White Madames . . . French?”

“*Mui-tsai* . . . White?” he cried, suddenly exultant.

He had associated my first demand with my second. In this way, he could understand what I meant.

An ordinary *mui-tsai*, a little Chinese girl, a slave and a prostitute—that, in his eyes, was below the level of my lordship. But the same thing, with a White skin! Why, yes, of course. Excellent! A treat! This way, my prince. For this article, too, figured in his catalogue.

He set off ahead of me, stepping his briskest, into the native streets beyond the Jervois Street cross-road. I followed him, ashamed, but moved by extreme curiosity.

CHAPTER XVII

“PAGAN SLAVE-GIRLS, CHRISTIAN MASTERS”

NOW, in the course of that earlier voyage which I have already mentioned, I had the honour of being received by His Excellency Sir William Peel, Governor for His Majesty the King, at Government House in Hong-Kong.

This reception constituted an interlude in between some highly instructive excursions of mine in the island and its dependencies. What a colony! “What stones!” as the good Jews of the time of Solomon used to say, when they looked at the temple of Jerusalem. Especially when you remember that this great counter of the most up-to-date of shopkeepers was still, in 1841, the lair of a handful of wild fishermen. . . . When you remember that the Chinese made England a present of these rocks, as a derisory indemnity for the loss of a stock of opium. . . .

If the whole of our civilisation should be adjudged bad, the history of Hong-Kong, in the hands of the English, would remain no less splendid, as an example of effort. It is paralleled by the history of French Indo-China, and by that of Shanghai.

Everywhere the Yellows ceded the Whites their leavings: deserts and swamps. The Whites have metamorphosed these alms into oil-wells. . . .

Nevertheless, sometimes a certain amount of mud still gushes out of them. What else could you expect? And it is much better, it seems to me, to recognise the fact boldly, in order to clean up this last stain of barbarism.

His Excellency Sir William Peel has too much brains not to be in agreement with me on this point. It might well form a subject of conversation between him and our own His Excellency, M. Pierre Pasquier. The two administrators, I imagine, would say to one another: “We have to govern men, and we are no gods. . . .”

For my part, I began by bearing with a conversationalist of lower degree, no less sincere—but less brainy. This distinguished British officer tried to convince me that Hong-Kong was a city of absolute virtue.

“There used to be certain establishments in Flower Street and elsewhere,” he assured me complacently. “You French tolerate that kind of thing. . . . We couldn’t; it was unworthy of a Christian country. We have suppressed it, we have uprooted it, we have cleaned up the last vestiges of it. *No such ignominy now exists* under our Union Jack, under the English flag. Hong-Kong is sterilised.”

Had I asked him to go so far? Not at all. But he insisted on stuffing my head. In that respect, however, I am stoutly armour-plated since 1914. Besides, I had had to do with such maniacs of orthodoxy long before I went to Hong-Kong. I have encountered them in every administration.

So I made him my best bow, and carried my tea-cup to another corner of the drawing-room. An open bay-window looking out on the panorama of the harbour attracted me. Government House is planted on a mountain-side. By daylight and by starlight what you look down upon from up there seems, once again, predestined for the cinema. Sky, sea, islands, ships, houses—yes, it is all a film. I lingered over it.

“And just think,” a rather breathless feminine voice declared behind me, “just think that, amid all this delight for the eyes, thousands of children are suffering in slavery, tortured, defiled! . . .”

I jumped. The lady leant on the balcony beside me. She was an Englishwoman going grey, thin, a bundle of nerves. She belonged to that type of suffragettes who would allow themselves to be crucified at the mere sound of the phrase: “individual liberty.” Another kind of Puritans, but at least large-hearted.

"In slavery? Children?" I repeated.

"Yes. . . . I overheard what the colonel was saying to you. It isn't true. He passed over the *mui-tsai* in silence."

"What are they?"

"*Mui-tsai* means 'indentured servant.' They are all wretched little girls whom their lower class Chinese parents sell just as though they were animals."

"What? Even now?"

"They used to drown them, Monsieur. Now they sell them, either because they're really impoverished, or to pay taxes or for a funeral, or just because they're gamblers or opium-smokers. . . . In any case, a daughter still doesn't amount to much in their eyes."

"But surely these sales aren't legal."

"Obviously they're not, according to our English code, which prohibits all slavery. Nor are they according to republican legislation in China! But *in fact* they persist, despite a struggle which has been going on for nearly a century. They give rise to contracts which our magistrates recognise and enforce—just imagine that! The sellers and re-sellers of slave girls are surer of their property in this Crown Colony than they are in Cantonese territory. . . ."

"One-third of the way through the Twentieth Century? It's not possible!"

"When she took possession of Hong-Kong, in 1841, Great Britain proclaimed that she would respect the customs of Asiatic immigrants. That was the starting-point of the scandal."

"Since, I take it, at that time slavery was a Chinese *custom*?"

"And so it has remained. As early as 1845, the Queen had it prohibited here, by an official Ordinance. But by that time the existing situation made its enforcement inoperative. Since then everything has been vain—Christian propaganda or official efforts, denunciations by indignant private individuals or anti-slavery societies, campaigns by London newspapers or vehement debates in our House of Commons. . . ."

"It still goes on?"

"And it's getting worse! In 1922 the number of *mui-tsai* disclosed, or admitted by their masters, was estimated at eight thousand. In 1929 a further inquiry raised this figure to ten thousand. And that is certainly still short of the true number. On the other hand, the purchase-value of a little girl tripled during those seven years. It rose from fifty to one hundred and fifty Hong-Kong dollars, on an average."

"That, no doubt, was the most apparent result of the anti-slavery campaign?"

"Quite so, Monsieur. All this is already public property in England. Read *Pagan Slave-girls, Christian Masters*, by Bushnell and Andrew. Read *Child Slavery in Hong-Kong*, by Commander and Mrs. Haslewood. The latter book was published in 1930. Read, too, the *Manchester Guardian* of January 16th, 1929, and the report of the Commons debate on February 4th, 1929. Since then, still more ink spilt! But still there are these girls under age who are hypocritically 'adopted,' who are shut up, who are terrorised and beaten, who are made to work fifteen hours out of the twenty-four; or who are brow-beaten into making innocent replies to the police questionnaire before they are sent, by the shipload, to houses of ill-fame all over the Far East—once they have finished their training in establishments of prostitution, admitted or clandestine, in Hong-Kong itself."

"So there are such establishments?"

"In every street, in the Chinese quarter. Monsieur, following in the footsteps of our Governor Hennessy, of Chief Justice John Smale, of Mrs. Hickling and many other noble-minded people, I have discovered for myself this crime which is being

committed here against childhood. And I have devoted myself, in my own humble way, to combating it. What I have seen and heard has often moved me to tears. It has made me understand the infinity of human wretchedness; but also, sometimes of human courage. But you're French, and perhaps you'll smile. . . ."

"We are capable of tears, too, Madame. . . . In short, Hong-Kong is still, to this very day, the central market for a traffic in Yellow girls under age?"

"Ask the captains of the cargo-steamers that radiate towards Singapore and India, towards Shanghai and Tientsin, and even towards America. . . . The profits of the traffic are so enormous that they make people prepared to run any risks. . . . And besides, there are so many consciences for sale, everywhere! It's scarcely even a smuggling traffic."

"Still less than the White Slave traffic, whose development in China is more of a novelty?"

"About the White Slave traffic in Hong-Kong and Canton I could tell you some terrible things, too, Monsieur. But the *two kinds of traffic*, since they both concern women, Yellow or White, run parallel, are linked together, *join hands with one another*. Do you know what is the most outrageous thing to us English in the tolerance shown for the *mui-tsai*, Monsieur? Well, the ones of these defenceless victims who are quoted at the highest price in dollars are *half-breeds*, the illegitimate daughters of Whites, of Europeans; here, as a rule, of Britishers. . . .

"Some of them are thus born into slavery of a prostitute who is herself enslaved. The father is one of our own people! He goes to debauch himself for an hour. He knows nothing about his paternity. And the child, in whom *our blood* predominates, is almost White; and the Chinese *in our own colony* sell her among themselves, only too proud to be able to maltreat a three-quarters Englishwoman. . . . Such is the shame of Hong-Kong."

As I followed my cadaverous procurer—himself the product of cross-breeding—through the labyrinth of the Chinese city, I could hear Mrs. X.'s poignant words ringing in my memory. . . . Now you will understand why I was so keenly curious about the *mui-tsai*.

CHAPTER XVIII

IS FLOWER STREET REALLY DEFLOWERED?

SINCE that conversation at Government House I had interrogated other witnesses. And I had read everything the Hong-Kong book shops possessed about this great dispute: notably the terrible charge-sheet drawn up by Commander and Mrs. Haslewood, *Child Slavery*.

My first personal observations in themselves convinced me that there was no exaggeration in this little book, all throbbing with pity and indignation, which dealt some hard knocks at the hypocrisy of certain British officials.

In this same China Town, which was so entertaining, I could see, without troubling to go and look for them, wretched boys carrying crushing burdens. Slaves, *regular slaves bought and resaleable*, with suffering, wizened faces. I could confirm the multiplicity of those houses called "brothels" in the unsophisticated English vocabulary, where droves of little Yellow girls were made ready, both in Victoria and in Kowloon, for a lifetime of prostitution, on the spot or overseas. I was satisfied that the exportation of such flowers as these still went on, as an important item in the Chinese sea and river coastwise trade.

"Growing flowers for pleasure," they say in good Chinese: "*Cho chu fanh*." It is a kind of horticulture like any other. The gardeners who practice it are well regarded everywhere: for they make a fine fortune!

As for the practical impotence of the administration of His Britannic Majesty, during eighty years of the traffic in girls under age under its flag, from 1850 to 1930, I had confirmation of it—nor was I surprised at it. That a Colonial Secretary in London, Mr. Amery, should be able to proclaim, on March 31st, 1920: "Slavery does not exist in Hong-Kong" was quite the normal thing; for his Press-agents' gloss was: "There aren't any *slaves* there—just *mui-tsai*." That civilised magistrates and policemen should hand back to their persecutors little servant-girls, black and blue from rattan-beatings and branded with a red-hot iron when they dared to run away, was an unquestionable step towards the maintenance of order. You invoked purchase, the sanctity of contracts. The whole dogma of the sovereignty of money was at stake.

It was also quite natural that the English harbour police should witness generation after generation of adolescent Chinese girls parading past them, without modifying in any way the routine of that questionnaire of theirs, full of a cynical sense of humour.

"Are you a prostitute?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you embarking of your own free will?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has anybody suggested these answers of yours to you?"

"No, sir."

The dispatchers of this cargo doubtless found good arguments for allaying any scruples on the part of the Christian official whose duty it was to check this exodus of pagan lambs.

If the Whites, in colonial countries, could show themselves superior to all carnal and moral failings, then it would be easy enough for them to correct the abuses and outrages of the natives. They would cease to set them an example.

But the deeper reason for the almost incredible indulgence of the English towards the *mui-tsai* system in Hong-Kong, with all the contempt for Biblical precepts and individual rights which it involves—is it not undoubtedly to be found inside the con-

sciences of gentlemen who are pure Westerners: gentlemen who are assiduous clients of the brothels and, now and again, the fathers of a few half-breed recruits, of a few little flowers who are hybrids and therefore higher-priced?

Alas, in my own walks abroad in my capacity as an investigator, I, too, ran the risk of corroborating, in the eyes of Asiatics, the idea that every European is, in the first place, just a brute. I had demanded, of my own accord: "*Mui-tsai*?" And here I was on my way to them.

After the central streets, we went through lanes: still in the midst of a very brightly-lit, very cheery hubbub—cinema-China stuff, both in colour and sound. Loud-speakers in the bazaars broadcast that caterwauling music which, as long as we are out there, get on our nerves; but which, later on, comes to life again in the traveller's mind and makes him oddly homesick for China. . . .

My good friend the black-gloved leper stopped at a narrow black doorway, with a white-and-red lantern over it—the same as all the neighbouring doorways. Here we were.

The staircase went straight up, like a ladder, into darkness. The smell signified—since this was Asia—a place extremely clean. It was like book-binders' gum among us. I came out, in fact, into a highly respectable room, with coffers around it, and a little altar in scarlet and gold.

As they heard us coming up, there emerged an old Chinaman, who looked like an old woman, a grandmother; and an old Chinese woman who, for her part, looked like a grandfather. China is a country of paradoxes, you know.

These good people conversed with my introducer. Then they begged me to be seated—not without plenty of smiles and bows. A few moments later they offered me the damp, well-warmed napkin and the excellent cup of green tea that went with the most ceremonious of receptions.

The impression that all this conveyed was of the friendliest kind. I heard whisperings and creakings in the next room. Surely these must be the children of the house, my hosts' grand-nieces, examining me through some crevice?

"*Mui-tsai* . . . White?" my friend the larva repeated at this point. He was standing shyly just insider the door—lest he should sully the floor with his diseases, I supposed.

I nodded. And, forthwith, they brought me that pearl of theirs.

At first sight, I swear, she was absolutely a little English girl. She was about thirteen or fourteen, with her reddish hair cut Joan of Arc fashion (so complimentary on the part of the British!) and her skin all milk and roses. A woollen jumper constituted her whole costume. To tell the truth, she seemed well-nourished; and she, too, was all smiles as she stood between those two old people her adoptive parents. She might be a slave, she might be a prostitute; but she was no martyr.

"You Missy Frenchy? He English girl," her kind uncle wafted to me in his "pidgin."

Doubtless he was aware that, as between nations, the Whites hated one another. And he imagined that defiling an English girl would give a Frenchman peculiar pleasure. I shook my head decisively, by way of undeceiving him.

"Just have a look at her," the three adults urged me, with voice and gesture.

Thus encouraged, the poor little girl approached me, very nicely. She had a few marks on her legs. Were they the result of her cross-breeding? Or did they mean disease?

"*Tres bon, Missi*. Oll ligh! You likee? No need fear police—no nothing," they kept on saying, to your heart's content.

What could I do, except get up and go? To try and moralise would have been a waste of time.

"No, my no likee. Take me see other thing, somewhere else," I went on to my guide.

Chinese politeness is imperturbable. There were further smiles. They offered me more tea. I managed to get down the steep staircase again without breaking my back.

A White *mui-tsai*, under age, at the disposal of any passing lord—I had seen her with my own eyes!

Thus edified, I felt a queer kind of remorse towards the gloved ghost. I had taken up his time, this pseudo-Frenchman, and I had disappointed him. He wavered in front of me, so comical in the now rather misty street that I wondered whether he were not going to vanish, to come, at long last, to an end. . . .

"Other thing," I repeated to him. "White madame, grown-up madame, French-woman Flower Street chop."

He smiled his lamentable smile again, but he begged off.

"Flower Street finished. . . ."

Was it possible? Had the colonel at Government House informed me correctly on this point? Flower Street, once so notorious in Victoria—was it indeed quite deflowered?

"In Kowloon only. . . . Boarding places," my forlorn Baedeker of mercenary love corrected me.

"In Kowloon? You know where?"

He started shivering all over with vexation. No, he didn't know that. Kowloon was outside his beat; it was not his speciality. In desperation, he suggested to me the only thing he still knew in Victoria: Japanese women who get Korean girls to massage you. . . . No thanks! I had made that round already with a fellow in the Navy.

"Take me back to town, and then off with you. . . ."

I found myself alone again in the main Des Voeux Road, completely English, under arcades and outside shop-windows that were ultra-modern: our Rue de Rivoli transported to Hong-Kong.

It was cocktail-time. I went into the bar of the Saint-Francis. It is a hotel now a little old-fashioned. It has the reputation of being "French" in style. In the British Far East you cannot say that this is a cachet of strictness about morals. . . . In short, I hoped for a chance of adding to my documentation there.

And chance played up to me, as you will see. There are some people who travel without striking up acquaintance with anybody. There are others who strike up acquaintance everywhere. As a matter of taste, in addition to a matter of profession, I belong to the second class.

There was not a soul in the bar, with the exception of a young woman whose solitude did not seem to worry her in the least. She was rocking herself on her stool, and now and again she gurgled with laughter. This exuberance of hers showed me at once that she was no Anglo-Saxon.

I took another stool. I looked at her with no unfriendly eyes. She was a fine-looking girl, dressed up like a Parisian woman who seeks to please foreigners: in other words, a bit outrageously. A brunette, dyed blonde. With a nose perhaps rather prominent and plebeian. But a determined face, full of character. It was she who accosted me.

"Hullo, a Frenchman!"

"I just happened to be looking for a Frenchwoman in Hong-Kong," I replied, moving my glass over alongside hers.

"A friend of yours?"

"Not at all. . . . A stranger who might prove a friend: you, for example."

"Oh, really? Well, my dear, *for that* you've turned up just at the wrong time. Nothing doing."

"Pardon me. . . ."

"But I can send you to a friend of mine."

"In Kowloon, in a boarding-house?"

"You're well informed, for a new-comer!"

I explained to her that this was just my business: informing myself. And that, in short, I should be obliged to her for some information—neither more, nor less.

At that she nearly fell off her stool for joy: which would have been amusing for the barman and myself. She was drunk, but it was with delight.

"If all you want is for me to talk, you've turned up pat as though you'd been invited. Never, let me tell you, in the whole course of my hectic life, could you have found me more lit-up. The day before yesterday I should probably have thrown my drink in your face. This evening I'm so pleased with myself that I'm going to pay for yours. . . ."

"No, really. . . ."

"My dear chap, if you think it will be the first time I've ever paid instead of a man! Besides, you're going to take me out to dinner afterwards."

"Ah, that's better!"

"And then, if you're really interested in the 'profession,' after dinner you can come on board the Canton steamer with me. . . ."

"Canton? I've been there already."

"You haven't seen what I can show you. Just imagine, this very day *I'm retiring from the ranks*. I'm joining the Staff, I'm going to set up on my own account. . . ."

"Good for you!"

"I should say it is. Well, to begin with, my name's Margot. Margot the Great. You can just ask whether I've been a success, from Saigon to Shanghai, ever since I went into business with Lucien the Chauffeur to 'do Asia.' "

Then we went out to dinner. It was a gay one!

CHAPTER XIX

CANTON STEAMER, SO LIVELY YOU CAN'T SLEEP

SO by now we were on the best of terms as good compatriots and comrades, Margot the Great and I. "It's fine, this panorama of Hong-Kong by night," I said to her, as we leant on the rail of the Pearl River steamer, the *Lung-Shan*, in which we had just left for Canton.

Behind us, the whole city of Victoria scaled the sides of the Peak in thousands of lights. A necklace of lamps circled the summit of the mountain, like big diamonds on the bosom of a black sultana.

Down below, innumerable junks, with their red and green riding-lights. Above them flamed the big Chinese restaurants on the quay, advertised by enormous characters of fire. In the harbour we passed mail-steamers swinging at their moorings. Every one of them shone like a shrine, from water-line to mast-head. And we were about to change course past Kowloon, another quay, another city, another electric furnace no less remarkable around a dazzling mass: the Hotel Peninsula. In nocturnal splendour neither Naples nor Genoa can rival this unique harbour of Asia.

"You get tired of it, you know," replied Margot, "when you see it once a week."

"You make this trip every week?"

"I certainly do. Otherwise the English would put me in jail."

At dinner we had drunk a Chablis which was a bit open to suspicion; but still it served to warm up our friendship.

"It comes from a long way off," said the girl. "On the way they probably freshen it up with Australian claret! No mater. You're treating me here. In Canton, I'll get you treated. You'll be able to drink old Chinese wine."

Then she told me all about her short but full life.

"I was nineteen when I came out to Indo-China. I'm twenty-three now. At Saigon I hooked up with two other girls, Dédé and Mimi. We had a man who kept us in tow. To stop us juggling with his money, he managed like this: when one of us landed a client, the present was handed over to the second, and the third checked it. . . ."

"A fine system!"

"I soon had enough of it. I joined up with Lucien. He's an ace, too, and a war-hero: a hundred-per-cent wound pension. But you'd never think it, to see him chucking a drunk out of the 'Caveau Montmartre' at Shanghai, where he has to do the dirty jobs. That's why he's called Lucien the Chauffeur. He's hard-boiled, as you'll soon see, if you ever meet him."

Margot was a good prophet. When I did meet him, Lucien won my liking. Was it his fault if Jean Bart, Surcouf, Duguay-Trouin, and other pirate captains sail the seas no more? Those who might have been their sailors go pirating as best they can nowadays on their own account, in China and elsewhere.

"Louis fixed me up here, Hong-Kong, in a house in Flower Street."

"In Flower Street, eh?"

"It was still working, at that time. There were five houses, all of them very well run, with nothing but White women. The Europeans came at one time, and the Yellows at another. Everything was peace and prosperity. Then the parsons and a lot of English old maids kicked up a row, just by way of annoying their neighbours. The

police shut it all up. All the capital was lost. To-day those houses are just ordinary dwelling-houses.”

“Which doesn’t necessarily mean that they have gone over from vice to virtue.”

“I don’t know anything about that. So far as I was concerned, I worked with my little man at Shanghai after that. There I got quite accustomed to the ways of Chinamen in love.”

“So they’re not just the same as anybody else?” I asked.

“No, they’re rather peculiar. With them, to begin with, you’re not worth anything if you get impatient with their polite patter, which goes on for ever. They stay sitting in front of you, with their hands in their sleeves, looking daft. And they cluck at you, they gobble at you: ‘You are even more beautiful than I thought. Your arms are as firm as bamboo-shoots and as round as a cloud under the autumn moon.’ If you start giggling at them, they despise you and they take themselves off. On the contrary, you’ve got to bow modestly and tell them: ‘I am charmed, but you are too kind. I do not deserve your favour. I am too ugly to keep your company.’ That’s the stuff, my dear! Then you see them drivelling with delight.”

“And what else?”

“What more do you want to know? They’re just men, after all. Some people say: ‘They’re complicated!’ That’s all rot. With them it’s straightforward and quick; but they come back for more. As a rule, they don’t like you to show any initiative. I knew one who used to say: ‘You move? Ten dollars. You not move? Twenty dollars.’ ”

“Why not write a monograph about it?”

“Don’t you start pulling my leg! From Shanghai, I came back here. I didn’t want to, but it was to Lucien’s advantage, and I couldn’t say no. Unfortunately, it was nothing like the good old days. The police make life hard for us. We aren’t allowed to stay in Victoria. In Kowloon, in a few dirty boarding-houses, you can get one foot in, but only for a week. At the end of it they lock you up or turn you out. So my comrades and I prefer changes of air. Once our permitted week among the English is up, we spend a week in Canton, at the Hotel Asia, or somewhere else. Then another turn at Hong-Kong. It was better for my health; and it kept business moving. . . .”

She seemed to be singing the praises of days bygone.

“But my knowing Margot,” I asked her, “aren’t you still ringing the changes? Don’t I see you at this very moment *en route* for your week in Canton?”

She nearly knocked over the Chablis, and the whole table with it, so jumpy was she in her enthusiasm.

“No, no! The business is *fini* for me—*f, i, n, i, fini*! I tell you again: I’m going into management. . . .”

Only that wasn’t just the word she used!

“Have you won a prize in a lottery?”

“No, it’s my Lucien. He’s just struck it lucky in Shanghai, shells and all. . . . Talk about pluck! There’s a fellow for you! I told you he went through the war in Europe, didn’t I—the Great War? So he just laughs at battles Chinese-fashion, or even Japanese-fashion. They strike him as just play-acting.”

“A blunderbuss is good enough to kill the bravest of veterans,” I objected. “But did Lucien join a Yellow army, then?”

Margot shook her head, and proceeded to explain the whole business to me.

In China there is always a certain amount of fighting going on. In the spring of 1932 things were more serious. Japan had a squadron moored at the entrance to the Wangpu River, and was bombarding Wusung, the maritime fortress of purely Chinese Shanghai. Then Japanese heavy artillery was disembarked, with human personnel to

match. Planes hovered in the sky. The extensive suburb sown with villas, universities and factories around the Kiang-Wan race-course came in for a fine drubbing.

The storm of steel spread into the very crowded streets of the great suburb of Chapei, which has overflowed to the north of international Shanghai. There was a good deal of damage done. I saw it still fresh when I got to Shanghai. It wasn't Verdun; but you do the best you can. For Japan and China, it wasn't such a bad effort in itself.

The episode must have given them plenty to think about at Geneva. You can imagine how closely we followed it in Indo-China and along the Southern Asiatic round. It was running its course, like a disease well under control, while I was navigating in these more peaceful waters of Hong-Kong.

The inhabitants of Wusung, of Kiang-Wan, and finally of Chapei had fled their homes, which might or might not be doomed to destruction. They took refuge in the European Settlements, under the protection of European and American troops. The rich went in their cars, and the poor in carts or on foot, bringing plague with them in their bundles. All of them could congratulate themselves that the Whites had not yet surrendered the Concessions to the Nankin Government, as at one time they were on the point of doing.

So there was left a deserted "no-man's-land," in between the Chinese "Nineteenth Army," which was in retreat, very much shaken, and the Japanese columns, which were preparing for a fresh advance. It was here that Lucien the Chauffeur found a use for his bravery.

"No, he didn't join up," cried Margot. "No such fool! These squabbles among the Yellows don't mean anything to him. And besides, he's had enough of being in uniform. He's a pacifist now."

"I see. But then what?"

"It was like this. In the night-clubs he got to know the very richest Chinese in Shanghai. They, and friends of theirs, had warehouses and shops in the war-zone. Everything left at sixes and sevens, and still stuffed with safes, and furniture, and goods. Fortunes lost! So Lucien—he's a man you can trust, you know—signed a contract with the owners for salvage. Banknotes, jewellery, documents, and family portraits—all these were to be returned to the Chinese. But everything else was to become the property of the salvage corps by way of their compensation.

"So then Louis hired a few old lorries, and recruited a few fellows who'd got guts too. And they started straight on the job, across the lines. They took their chance of being blown to bits by a shell, or shot by the enemy for looters. I'd never have let him do it, if I'd known. But he's a lucky dog, that man of mine. His lorries came back laden to bursting-point, without a scratch on them. He sold the whole stock back on the spot to his clients themselves. He made a good turn-over. In short, it means a nice fat sum, the start towards a real fortune. . . ."

"And a fine yarn, too! Then, so far as you're concerned, Margot, you're saved from now on from paying with your own person?"

"Yes," she said, with unaffected happiness. "Not that I was a martyr before. But I didn't like it always, either. And above all, Lucien is proving to me that I'm 'his woman.' He might have kept it all for himself, or at least thought twice about it. Instead of that, by the very first mail he told me: 'That'll do. Shut up shop, put up your shutters, stand yourself a treat, and off with you to Canton to look for a good investment.' "

"So that's the object of this voyage of yours, this time? What sort of an investment? A working-school?"

"Something of the kind," she confirmed. "I've two propositions in view. I'll tell you about them on the ship, and then you can judge for yourself. Come on, it's time we were getting on board."

So the *Lung-Shan* bore us away. As a last-minute passenger, I obtained a couch in a cabin already furnished with three Englishmen. Margot, a regular passenger, well known on this run, got her usual cabin: "for one lady only." She gave a rating to the steward—"boy," instead of his usual fine tip from her, thanks to which he closed his eyes to the nocturnal visits of various gentlemen to the French lady.

"*Fini*, Tong, see? Not a cent for you. No further use for you to-night. I'm going to lock my door. I'm going to sleep!"

Back on deck with me, she corrected herself.

"At least, I won't have anybody to annoy me, if I can sleep. But nobody ever sleeps aboard the Canton steamer. Things are much too lively. . . . From the first-class saloon down to the depths of the hold, there are people eating, drinking, squabbling, selling tiger skins and ancestor-tablets, smoking opium, playing mah-jong and strip-poker. . . . I've seen some jokers disembark in the morning stark naked: they had lost even their shirts. I've seen others who embarked with the intention of throwing themselves overboard; and in ten cuts of the cards they picked up enough to make a fresh start in life! The Canton steamer is all of a piece."

Around us the flaring coasts of Hong-Kong receded into the light mist in the estuary. Russian and Hindu quartermasters tested the bars and the armour-plating which protected the centre part of the ship, as in the case of all vessels in these waters exposed to the risk of piracy. They knew Margot. For love of her, they smiled at me.

"Come this way," she went on. "Let's go down and see the Chinese."

Over the companion-ways, prominent notices prohibited carrying concealed weapons. At the end of the alley-ways we were greeted by a warm, sickening blast of *breath*. More bars prevented passage, reinforced by sheets of metal with gratings. It was just like a prison-corridor. We were on the free citizens' side. On the other side, an immense between-decks, low and smoky, swarmed with fat Chinese women and their thin males, all huddled together pell-mell on folding-chairs, mats and hammocks.

"There are at least two thousand *passengers* shoved in there," said Margot the exact. "Not to speak of stowaways. But for the bars, you can just imagine how they'd rush us. . . ."

We went up again to have a drink in the saloon. It was like a club. Big windows, but barred with steel shutters. The carpet was red and blue, the chairs were Queen Anne, and the Yellow barmen had three chins. There were Cantonese gamblers in robes and spectacles; British gamblers, red-faced and in dinner jackets; pretty prostitutes from Europe, Asia and Australia. Noah's ark was only a miserable menagerie by comparison. Dice in their boxes and mah-jong pieces made their own queer sounds. Noisy games, wild parties!

"Well, what about this investment of yours in Canton?" said I to Margot.

CHAPTER XX

CANTON BARGAINS: CHINESE SWEETMEATS OR RUSSIAN HARD-TACK?

ABOARD this ship of the sleepless, sailing up the Pearl River, we nevertheless slept a bit, Margot and I, each in our own cabins. But we were up again at dawn for our arrival at that misleading façade of a great city in English style, which is presented on the quay of Canton by the Customs house, the Asia Hotel, and a few other buildings.

A grey, lowering sky; high, blackish, house-fronts. You might think this was Manchester—but for the cluster of tattered coolies clinging to the gangway, and finally carrying the *Lung-Shan* assault.

That Asia Hotel—what a . . . hotel! Here you can rent not only rooms, but also offices for any business—*any* business, I repeat. And there is a music-hall in the building. The fortune you have made by selling arms on the third floor you can spend comfortably on the sixth floor with the girls.

As the Hong-Kong steamer arrives early, business begins betimes. We snatched some breakfast, and then Margot was leading me through those dubious corridors, which reeked of opium.

“You can listen. You’re my adviser.”

She had an appointment with two partners: one of them an ex-officer of the British Army, and the other a Frenchman, an ex-chemist. A pretty pair, believe me. They complemented each other.

The Englishman had taught his partner what a rifle was. The chemist, in return, had initiated the son of Albion into the uses of drugs. As sidelines, they negotiated theatrical tours, marriages, property sales. To sum up, they could provide Bibles for a saintly pastor, as readily as a new Hell for the Devil himself, if he had come and asked them for one. For that matter, perfect gentlemen-adventurers, and as honest as outlaws can be.

“The red-light establishment we mentioned to you is one of the best in the Chung-Tong neighbourhood,” said the Frenchman.

“But the Cheng-Si-Men Russian night-club isn’t too bad, either,” added the Englishman.

“Now listen to me,” retorted Margot. “Whatever I buy, I’m going to run it myself, in person, with my husband Lucien’s savings. You know him, don’t you? He’s a very nice fellow. But you just let us in for a bad deal, and it won’t be long before he comes and pushes your faces in for you!”

“Go and see for yourself, in confidence,” they said.

We made a start with the Russians. A series of telephone-talks had ended with our being invited to a very late lunch by the Chinese guild which was disposing of the “garden of fresh flowers” in Chung-Tong.

So, in an icy wind, an American saloon-car carried us into the heart of Canton the surprising. What a city! . . . It is honeycombed with motor roads such as we scarcely have in Paris: the last word in urban civilisation. But the gaping walls of old tumble-down houses, bought up and blown up, still border these avenues. And, in the neighbouring alleys, craftsmen with Satan’s own patience carve ivory, inlay lacquer smooth as velvet, and glue together microscopic fishing-martins’ feathers, in accordance with the technique of a thousand years ago.

As for the American obelisk erected to the glory of Sun-Yat-Sen, it is raised like a preacher's forefinger over this swarm of laborious poverty and hidden wealth. Canton is a jealous, hypocritical, masked city. It is the masterpiece of Chinese syndicalism—and also of a kind of pseudo-Bolshevism which is purely Asiatic.

The women from Russia-in-Europe or Siberia who ply as prostitutes in Canton are really there for the benefit of the Yellows. The little colony of Whites is all contained on the island of Chamine. Together with the sailors from the gunboats, it would not suffice to provide custom for three or four night-clubs, such as the one we were on our way to visit.

"For that matter," Margot explained to me, "the Whites here often have rather a fancy for Yellow women. I've known some who've 'lost face' badly like that. . . . And the Yellows, for their part, don't like sharing. Do you know that formerly they never let a European into their 'flower-baskets'? And even to-day, if a Russian woman who has gone with them goes back to a man of their own race, they boycott her afterwards. They don't want anything more to do with her."

The night-club was called "*Kazbek*," thanks to some Caucasian godmother. It occupied a blackish house, two floors high. No sign outside. The room on the ground-floor, beneath its garlands of flags, was unswept, and it still stank of the night before.

For our benefit, the proprietress who was giving up this gold-mine, "after making her fortune," dragged herself out of bed. She came down with her eyes puffy and her kimono slung on anyhow. She would never see forty again—or, at least, she looked like it when she was wakened up like this.

"I've made money," she confided to us in cooing English. "Now I'm retiring, and nobody will ever know what my profession was. I've made sure of my son's future. He's eleven, and he's a boarder at one of the best schools in Hong-Kong. I go to see him every week. When his little British school-fellows ask him: 'What does your mother do?' he tells them: 'She runs a charitable institution.' Very clever boy. He knows what life is, even at his age."

"So it pays, this bazaar of yours?" interrupted Margot, practical and keen-eyed.

The Russian woman look at her sourly. She went on, for my special benefit:

"I never ought to have led such a life. I'm well educated. My husband was an officer. He drank. He left me with the baby. I've had to go through . . ."

"So have we all," cut in Margot. "Have you got any bedrooms?"

"Upstairs, Madame. My Siberian girls rent them from me at a hundred dollars a month. They get 50 per cent on the drink takings. It's mostly champagne at the '*Kazbek*.' I don't let any of the riff-raff in here. . . ."

"Let's go, shall we?" my French lady friend whispered to me. "It's only a flat-trap. She's just bluffing us. . . ."

We returned to the Chung-Tong. This purely Chinese festive neighbourhood is not very far away from Chamine. We went for a walk there on foot, the better to observe the appearance of the red-light "garden" which was up for sale.

The entire street, consisting of grey buildings, was devoted to this one business. As in our old provinces, the joy-barracks stood side by side. Their respective reputations and scale of prices kept up competition.

Through doors carved in open-work we could see spacious halls. Altars, on which incense burnt in honour of good genies, sanctified them. Against the walls, sitting on benches, little ladies of Canton waited for mandarins. They were all tiny, and they wore tight-fitting artificial silk (Oh, progress!). Their stiff black hair was fluffed up and cut very short. Their faces, no bigger than your fist, had been plastered rather than

powdered. Thus super-Whitened, they looked like so many stranded snipe at an employment agency.

"This is more than a factory, anyway," said Margot, visibly impressed.

We went in. Any number of salutations. Upstairs there were cells very similar to our equivalents in Europe; but very modest, very poverty-stricken. Still Margot seemed satisfied.

"The books, the accounts!" she demanded.

The old Chinese woman in charge produced a mass of yellow scrolls, blotched with black and red. My good friend ran through them, and apparently managed to make something out of them.

"All right. I'll talk business. The Sing-Song restaurant is a couple of yards away. Let's go there."

The big Cantonese restaurants, as a matter of fact, are all grouped together, just like the love-institutes, and not far from them: a judicious proximity.

Our own restaurant—the best, no doubt—stood right in the middle of a street newly widened. It was a painted edifice, gay with flowery balconies, mirrors in gold mounts, and streamers. Inside, a rock pool sheltered fat fish. Every floor was divided into private rooms. The Chinese always play their pranks very decorously.

Our host had everything ready for us. He was the *comprador* of the guild. Guild means a trade association, and *comprador* means banker or backer.

But these two words have also a more mysterious value: they sum up all that China which speculates, and trafficks, and swindles; that careerist, smuggling China to which all our lessons have taught no morals!

I had met more than one comprador: but I had never seen a more finished specimen.

His watered silk robe was like the cassock of a high priest of mercantilism. His round head of an Asiatic pierrot oozed shrewdness and poetry. He was one of the few Chinamen whom I have ever heard transpose the repertory of their old-time imagery into their modern jargon.

He said to me, with a smile: "You who have read *five wagon-loads of books . . .*"; and to Margot, by way of vaunting for her benefit a bargain not to be missed: "You pay *the purchase price of a brick*, and you possess *a block of jade*."

"That may be, my good man," replied Margot, coolly. "But none of your patter for me! I'm thinking about it. No good trying to rush me. We'll talk about it again over the dessert."

You do not sit down in a hurry to a Chinese meal. It was not yet afternoon. Some of the guests were smoking. Others were playing mah-jong.

There were several Cantonese; the chemist and the dealer in arms; a friend—and hitherto a colleague—of Margot's, named Clara; and a young Russian adventurer, whose neurasthenia really got on your own nerves. Apparently it was he who had proposed the night-club transaction, and he saw his commission vanishing into thin air. "*Nitchevo!*" he kept on saying, as he pulled at the bamboo stem of his pipe like a regular little glutton. The obliging Chinese answered him: "*Maskee!*" which, in their pidgin, also means: "The world's a snare!" But they said it, for their part, with a smile. For China is a land of optimists.

I preferred to interview Clara. This prepossessing Mediterranean girl had belonged to the famous Moulin-Rouge troupe at Sourabaya. I heard of M. Romajul again.

Michel Scarface had not led me astray. In May, 1931, the impresario disappeared and was never seen again. The cashier, a sometime seminarist, vanished too. The ar-

tistes, men and women, wanted to go on playing their tropical revue, entitled: *Belay, Malay!* But Malay was in no position to belay. Creditors seized even the musical instruments. So the poor girls scattered.

Clara was put into prison in Batavia. Then she made the acquaintance of Singapore, Saigon, Flower Street in Hong-Kong: the whole "Southern Round." Despite the final disaster, she still looked back on Sourabaya as a wonderful place. There the enchanting setting had ennobled her inevitable trafficking in her body. Since then, alas, she had become nothing but a common prostitute.

"It was so nice," she told me, dreamily. "On the Fourteenth of July, the Frenchmen who came to see us weren't even asked to pay for their drinks!"

A covey of little Yellow singing girls came in. This was our signal for sitting down to table. While we scuffled with chop-sticks in bowls, cups and saucers full of strange jellies, these young ladies, sitting behind us, started caterwauling.

"You know," whispered Margot, who had installed me on her right, "they come from *my* establishment. Not bad as a staff, eh?"

I agreed the more readily because I could tell she was bent on buying. One after the other, the little ones gave us samples of their falsetto. They accompanied themselves on citharas. It was charming: tom-cats do no better in autumnal nights.

The comprador emptied his glass to my fellow-countrywoman's health. "*Kam-pe!*" he cried. It was the Chinese way of saying: "No heel-taps, and may your nails turn ruby!" With the cognac, the ruby became topaz. Margot's pretty fingers showed that she had taken him at his word.

"So don't you think," she said, warmed and softened, "that I ought to write to Lucien: 'This is just the thing for us'?"

The Cantonese purred, and the girls caterwauled louder than ever. In his enthusiasm, the comprador nearly fell backwards, so much did he swell inside his robe.

"The ten thousand pleasures of the world, Madame, are yours for the taking in Chung-Tong! It will mean milk-and-honey for you. . . . With a single arrow, you will bring down two eagles. . . ."

He rang a bell. Forthwith a "boy" standing beside a window dashed out on to the balcony; and I was deafened by a series of frightful explosions.

In order to celebrate, in proper style, Margot's entrance into the guild of the "Maisons Tellier" of Canton, one of those ropes, plaited with squibs and other fireworks, which are the main accessory of any Chinese festivity, had just been touched off. It hung down to the pavement, from four floors up. Our ear-drums were in for a good quarter of an hour of caressing by it.

"We know how to have a good time here, just as well as in Shanghai," one of our hosts vaunted to me. He took it that I had come from the North, as an envoy of Lucien the Chauffeur.

"Shanghai!" I cried, in between two explosions. "That's the place I still have to see!"

PART III

Shanghai: Topside, Bottomside

CHAPTER XXI

SHANGHAI-ROMANCE AND SHANGHAI-REALITY

“SHANGHAI, my dear sir!” the admirals said to me, shaking their heads.
“Oh, yes, Shanghai and Shanghai women!” murmured the senior officers.
“Ah, but above all, Shanghai women!” exclaimed the midshipmen.
“But after all,” I said to the lot of them, “you have dallied in many another port under the sun. Don’t you count your adventures with girls anywhere else?”
“No!” they replied. “For pleasure and passion, for Women, there are only two cities in the world beyond compare: Shanghai and Paris.” (They did not even put Paris first.) “Come on, let’s take another turn round the deck. . . . Here’s something that happened to me in Shanghai. . . .”

We walked round and round, with the supple stride of sailors, on the holy-stoned planks of the quarter-deck. In between the long-muzzled guns we caught the warm, acrid breeze of the China Sea, and a shower of cinders. Whenever duty robbed me of my momentary trainer in this endless walk, another one emerged from the chart-room, or descended from the masthead. We readjusted our stride to the roll of the ship—one, two—and my fresh companion, too, quite casually conveyed to me that he had something on his mind.

“Has anybody told you anything about Shanghai . . . and the women there?”

So much so that in the end, drunk to the point of exhaustion with these stories, despite their charm, I pretended that I had some work to do, so that I could go down to my cabin, fling myself on my berth, and drowse there, obsessed by these words: “Shanghai. . . . The Shanghai women. . . .”

Now I look back with affectionate nostalgia on those lurching walks of ours, like bears uncaged, on those burning decks that creaked beneath us. How frank, how wholesome those comrades of mine were! And all their love-stories, even when they ended badly—how much more elevating they were than the embittered, sickening confessions of land-lubbers! . . .

I had the honour, at that time, of navigating as a guest aboard the stout ships of our Far Eastern squadron.

They were not modern ships. Their obsolescence proved the pacifism of the French Republic. But the crews who were sacrificed in them in advance, in case those old ironclads should ever have to give battle, deserved being called upon to play a part less desperate.

What attractive fellows you find in that Navy of ours! Even when they go unwashed, for lack of fresh water, they are still clean in their souls, and you can see it in their faces. Even the middling among them, even indeed the bad-hats, are transformed by force of circumstances, by tradition and way of life, into good company. I am extremely fond of mixing with them. It is as tonic as a dose of oxygen, that “yarning” of theirs, even on shore.

Yes, I heard plenty of anecdotes about Shanghai, aboard the nimble *Duguay-Trouin*; aboard the *Waldeck*, with all her smokestacks; aboard the *Inconstant*, in which they gave me the honorary rank of fore-top-man because I made no bones about paying my tribute to Neptune—in other words, sea-sickness. . . .

Shanghai the unique, Shanghai the stupendous! Shanghai, with all its majesty, all its medley, all its parti-coloured pleasures—Shanghai, city whose romance had become legendary, but which still remains blatantly realist. . . .

And the Shanghai women! A few dilettantes confided to me their preference for the Chinese courtesans, who used to be fierce with Whites and almost inaccessible. Nowadays they have grown tame. With their waved hair, their short skirts, they go out of their way to imitate White women, to ape them.

But such dilettantes were rare. Almost all my sailors extolled Shanghai as the great sanctuary of a White Venus, more radiant than the New York one, and more captivating even than the Parisian.

The seniors, the actual or budding admirals and the captains, had known a Shanghai that dated back before the appearance of the fair Russian women from Harbin. At that time the idols of mercenary love who dazzled the great Babel of Asia were Moldo-Wallachian women, or Californians.

There were very few Frenchwomen. They were astute enough to promote themselves shepherdesses of a sheep-fold, like the Gaby of a notorious nineteen; or like that distinguished Mme Foulard who, having made a fortune about 1910 in the industry of loose girdles, now sells nothing but hats.

“Anna was a regular sister to the Navy. . . . She drove up in her two-horse barouche to pick up our comrade M. and take him to hospital, when he fractured his skull in a motor accident, which may have been deliberate; for M. had had the bad luck to run the *Chanzy* aground, and he was under orders to appear before a court martial.”

“I suppose you were still only a midshipman at that time, Admiral?” I remarked.

“Yes. I was serving in the *Bruix*. And my pay was one hundred and fifty francs a month. On the other hand, the price of a thrill at Anna’s varied from five to thirty dollars. So I couldn’t go beyond the *salon*, where you could stand the girls a glass of champagne. . . . The only thing was that, if one of them took a fancy to you, you could arrange to meet her secretly somewhere else. . . .”

Now, in 1933, the midshipmen and cadets communicated in accordance with this formula: Shanghai women = Russian women.

One day, between Java and the Philippines, I happened to open a drawer in the cabin which a charming young sub-lieutenant had given up to me. I discovered a notebook in boards. I was indiscreet enough to read it. . . . It was his diary as a midshipman. Innocent, touching confessions by the boy, more isolated amid the Seven Seas than any provincial in the depths of the country.

Naturally, it was all about women. There was his little cousin in Brittany, his dream when he was still at the Naval College. She was already remote; she was getting blurred. And there was also, with much more power over his heart and his flesh, one Sonia, a Siberian girl, a cabaret-dancer in Shanghai, the very vamp of the films, sweet and cruel, capricious, mysterious, untamable, unforgettable. At the end the midshipman’s diary was all about her. . . .

With his voice trembling with enthusiasm another Breton youth told me:

“Those Russian girls—they manage to stay aristocratic, no matter how low they fall. You can’t get them just anyhow. Oh, no, they’re not going to give in. . . . When you take them out at two o’clock in the morning, now that they’re free at last after the closing of the big dance-hall where they’re ‘partners’ at half a dollar a ticket, they insist on your escorting them to some other haunt that stays open still later. And they make their entrance there just like princesses.”

Still another told me:

“Here’s a film-story from real life. The cruiser was stationed in the Wangpu, off Shanghai. One morning at eleven o’clock, a comrade of my own seniority came on board, just arrived from France. It was his first term of duty in Asiatic waters. We welcomed him to the ward-room with the usual jokes. We had a very gay lunch; and he asked us whether we knew a Russian girl, Mlle Sonia. . . .”

“What, another Sonia?”

“In Brest, another comrade, who had been sent home on the sick-list, had entrusted him with a letter to this girl. We told him at what bars he could probably find her. In the afternoon he went on shore to look for her: his first steps in Shanghai.”

“A good start!”

“In the evening he did not turn up to dinner. At three o’clock the next morning the officer of the watch saw him on his way to his berth. He was pale and dishevelled. He had killed a man for the sake of this Russian girl whom he had never set eyes on at noon.”

“Talk about a zealous messenger!”

“The man he had killed didn’t amount to much; and he might plead self-defence. Still, it was a nasty business, at the best. Our friend had the police after him. They reported to the admiral. As it happened, they were short of a midshipman on an Upper Yangtse gun-boat. She was getting up steam at four o’clock. By five o’clock Sonia’s champion was on his way to Ichang, watching Shanghai disappear round the bend of the Wusung.

“The murder-charge was dropped. The witnesses had none too clean consciences, either. They expelled the fair Russian, though it was really no fault of hers. She had just been herself. She’d simply seduced him. . . .”

CHAPTER XXII

“NAVY GIRLS” SHIP, AND WALKERS ON THE BUND

ONCE more I was on board a liner: a big, very comfortable American mail-packet. She was on her way from the Philippines, and she was taking me, at last, straight to Shanghai, against the icy wind which came down from Manchuria, in between China and Japan.

Prohibition ruled on board. In other words, you could not refresh your throat and your soul elsewhere than in your cabin. The result was to create an impression of emptiness in the public rooms comparable with that in a monastery where all the monks had gone to meditate in their cells.

I have acquired the habit of putting up with my own company, under all flags. Still, I suddenly felt bored in this ship. I missed a voice talking my own language, somebody who thought along French lines. All at once, above an open newspaper, in the depths of an arm-chair, I caught sight of a button-hole with a strip of ribbon.

“A Frenchman!” I cried.

The newspaper was lowered.

“*Hé, bou Diou!*” said the reader. He was actually a man from Marseilles.

He introduced himself: Marcel B. His face interested me on the spot. He was forty at the most, with curly black hair, straightforward eyes, and a gay, bold expression. Essentially a Latin. A tribune of the people, a legionary or a corsair—a man of the forum. Adventuring in hot countries had given him a fine tan. I love meeting bronzed faces like this.

“I say, this Yankee ship is funereal, isn’t she, my dear fellow-countryman?” I confided to him.

He took me by the arm, and we set off at a jaunty stride round the promenade-deck.

“It struck me as still more deadly,” he said, “seeing that I’ve been in Australia.”

“Is life gay down there?”

“For a Frenchman, it’s charming. . . . They hadn’t enough women on that continent, once; but nowadays they’ve only too many!”

He added, in friendly fashion:

“But even on board here we’ve got a few Australian women. I know how to talk to them. This evening we’ll go a-hunting. . . .”

“That’s very good of you. . . . Are these Australian women travelling all by themselves?”

“Certainly they are.”

“And where are they going?”

“Why, to Shanghai.”

“Oh, are they?”

“There are some nice American women, too—a few ‘Navy Girls.’ You know what they are?”

“Yes, I know,” I replied. “They’re ex-typists or ex-shop girls, who have become the wives of young officers in the United States Navy. They’ve got married just for the duration of a turn of Colonial duty, with a mutual understanding of divorce at the end of it. But, if the girl behaves herself, the marriage sometimes lasts longer. . . .”

“True,” Marcel agreed. “Still, as a rule, they set off free again from the Philippines, once they’ve fulfilled their marriage-contract. . . . And they don’t all go back to the United States. There are some of them who stop at one of our ports of call. . . .”

"Where do you mean?"

"Shanghai, of course."

"What, again? Do you know that marvel of a city well?"

"Shanghai? It's where I've spent most of my time for the last fourteen years, though I've run newspapers and planted rubber in Indo-China, and been all over the Far East afterwards."

"Then you must surely be a freeman of the city. Tell me, is it true that Shanghai is the Mecca of all the pimps in Asia, the biggest bazaar, the main market, in short the capital of a traffic in White flesh similar to that in South America?"

He burst out with that laugh of his, full of Mediterranean philosophy.

"You want to know about the pimps, the bullies, the White Slave traffickers of Shanghai? I'm their lawyer."

"My dear Marcel, the gods themselves must have thrown you right into the middle of my investigation! You say you're *their lawyer*?"

"A member of the Shanghai Bar," he assured me. "Not for much longer, perhaps; for France is going to surrender her privileges on the mixed tribunal in the Concession. But I shall remain my clients' adviser, just as I have been for years. I haven't only fellows in the 'profession.' I've others, too—still queerer fish."

"Yes, I can just imagine the kind of cases that may be submitted to counsel for the defence, in that part of the world."

"Or rather, you simply can't imagine it. Nothing surprises me any more. I'm sitting in my office, and the 'boy' ushers in some bold blade, who offers me a hand tattooed all over."

"'You come from Marseilles, Mr. Lawyer?'"

"'Yes, my friend.'"

"'I come from Roucas-Blanc.'"

"'Ah, my dear fellow! And what's your trouble?'"

"'Well, I'm a bully. . . .'"

"For that's just what they say. They find it quite natural. And, as a matter of fact, when they've explained themselves, I can quite understand. . . ."

"No doubt."

"My dear sir, it's purely a question of point of view! Pimps, smugglers of opium or arms, or even worse, all these clients of mine are honest in their own way. And they have a strong sense of justice."

"I see. In their eyes you are the 'redresser of wrongs.'"

"I'm no Don Quixote. But I've got my feelings, and I've made some enemies."

"And some friends?"

"Friends, yes. They've got their hearts in the right place, and they're grateful. Not all of them, of course. I've met bandits who were rotters into the bargain."

"The kind of men who let their trade down. . . . But let's stick to the traffickers in women."

"As much as you like."

"You've lived in Indo-China. In Saigon, did you meet the 'Men at the Dieppe'?"

"The hotel behind the theatre? I should think so. I was on friendly terms with all of them."

"Michel Scarface, for example?"

"Of course. And how is Scarface?"

"And the ladies: the ones who've come out of the ranks and got others to work for them: Suzanne at Cholon, Lolotte at Hanoi, Margot at Canton?"

"Yes; and how are all of them? Margot can thank her stars she's got a man like Lucien."

"So you know Lucien the Chauffeur, too?" I exclaimed.

"In Shanghai at the end of the avenue Joffre, I'll take you to have a drink at his place: the 'Caveau Montmartre.' He's one of the owners now, since his raid on Chapei."

"One of the owners? And who's the other?"

"The other is a fellow still more remarkable: His Excellency Paoletti, nicknamed the Admiral, a Corsican, a veteran of the Marines, and ex-Chief of Staff to the Chinese Marshal U-Pei-Fu."

"I should like to interview His Excellency."

"Over a brandy and ginger-ale, nothing could be easier. He's not in the business himself, mind you. He wouldn't condescend. . . . But he arbitrates, he presides. He's a man who's respected. . . ."

I felt I need not pick my words any more with Marcel. I took him by the elbow.

"And what about yourself?" I murmured.

"Myself?"

"In an environment like that. . . . Hasn't this wonderful profession ever tempted you?"

I was only joking; but, if he had anything on his conscience, he might well have reacted unpleasantly.

"No, never, I assure you," he said, laughing again. "You might not think it, from the way I behave, but I'm a profoundly respectable person. I've got a wife in Shanghai, and I keep her to myself. She's a Russian girl from Harbin. Her name's Koukla. I'll introduce you to her. I'm very fond of her, and I've been able to spare her the bad times so many other Siberian girls have. . . ."

"Good for you, Marcel!" said I. And I went on:

"I suppose these Siberian girls are in a big majority among White prostitutes in Shanghai?"

"It's estimated there are more than eight thousand of them—professional ones—taking the city as a whole."

"And other White women, similarly mercenary?"

"Two thousand, say."

"In all, then, ten thousand—at least? But surely the non-Asiatic population of Shanghai, men, women, and children, doesn't exceed sixty thousand Europeans and Americans? Surely the adult White males, bachelors and married men unfaithful to their wives, can hardly be as many as thirty thousand?"

"I suppose so. Besides, some of them have a preference for Chinese prostitutes—and there are any number of them."

"But, in that case, *who provides a livelihood for these ten thousand White women?*"

He made merry over my question.

"Why, the Chinese, of course!"

"Really?"

"Unquestionably. . . . Necessarily, inevitably. . . . There are two million Chinamen in Shanghai, plus all the coming and going from the interior. They make plenty of money, and they spend plenty of money. Besides, a Russian girl flatters their vanity more than a dancing-girl in a sing-song; and she costs them cheaper. For two hundred Mexican dollars a month she's theirs—and she thinks herself lucky, too. . . ."

"And what about Frenchwomen?"

“Oh, among all the White women they’re the highest paid!”

“So I’ve been told everywhere.”

We walked on for a few steps in silence; then he added:

“Two hundred Mexican dollars—that’s just what a Frenchwoman, well used to Chinese ways, well kept and well run by her ‘manager,’ could pick up in a single day. . . . That’s an outside figure, of course. The average runs from eighty to a hundred dollars a day.”

“At six francs to the Mexican dollar, that means from five to twelve hundred francs a day! In Argentine, even in its hey-day, there wasn’t much more to be made. . . . So there’s an exact parallel between the two traffics?”

“The system is standardised,” Marcel agreed. “A chain of men who pass the women on from hand to hand. There are the huntsmen, who pick her up in Europe, Siberia, and Australia. Then the forwarders. And, finally, the men who receive her, who initiate her, who exploit her, in Shanghai itself.”

“And almost all these women who are exploited like this know beforehand why they are being taken in hand? They’re either resigned or volunteers, either tired of being out of a job or attracted by the lure of adventure?”

“Absolutely. If they were under any constraint they could make their escape. *They accept their lot.* . . . If one of them happened to rebel, once it came to the point, I’m not saying that some of the fellows I know would hesitate about taming her, just by frightening her. They would persuade her not to go to the police, because she had no passport, or because she might be accused of stealing. . . . They might even teach her to smoke opium. They might shut her up in the middle of the Chinese city. . . . But melodrama of that kind is superfluous, as a rule. There are plenty of candidates quite prepared to go through with it. . . .”

“So here in Asia,” I emphasised, “these White women, these Frenchwomen, are contributing in this way to an association between the two races, which may prove a much more serious matter than mere prostitution in itself.”

“Yes, of course. It just rounds off all the other surrenders of the Whites in the presence of the Yellows. . . . It wouldn’t be so bad, either, if the pimps were Parisians, or Marseillais, or even Russians—anyway, men of our own Colour. But the worst of it is that you’ll see White women run by Japanese, or even Chinese. You, a White, though you may not be aware of it, will be paying your tithe to some Yellow bully, on whose behalf two or three Siberian girls sell themselves.

“In Shanghai anything is possible. That’s possible; and so is even more extraordinary trafficking for the sake of money. . . . I could keep on telling you stories from now until the time we get into the Wangpu river.”

We got in the Wangpu. What stories that “redresser of wrongs” had told me! And we had also satisfied ourselves that the “Navy Girls’ Ship” was a sad ship only on the surface.

With our baggage all strapped, pending the Customs examination, we went up on deck. It was a morning of wintry sun, just like February in Bordeaux. Once we rounded Wusung Point, I watched intently for my first sight of this new Babylon about which I had heard so much.

The first thing I saw was blackened ruins: a good beginning.

“The Japanese bombardment,” Marcel told me. “This was once a Chinese fort. That was once a beach hotel, and villas. . . . They’ll build them up again. Just a warning to Europe. . . .”

The liner wound her way, very gently, in between any number of cargo-ships, sampans, and junks, through the greasy water. On both banks of the river, docks began. Then red rounds on white squares fluttered at the top of squat grey masts. They were Japanese flags, flying aboard the victors' destroyers.

"That's the Bund over there," said Marcel.

In between big moored ships of every nation, we were approaching a water-front made up of colonnades, domes, and tall buildings in American style. Marcel went on:

"Well, does it surprise you?"

"No, it doesn't," I replied. "But it brings the Parisian, who has an instinct about cities, to life in me. Yes, this really is a big city. And I can see for myself, at once, that it's a very mixed one. . . ."

"Look right at the end of the quay," said he.

"The lowest building of all: that old, dirty, overwhelmed one. That's our poor French Consulate."

"It's a glorious flag that flies over it, all the same."

"You needn't tell me. . . . And now, right in front of us, you have the International Concession and the public gardens, built on piles over a lagoon. . . . That's where the Bund ends and Broadway begins. If you want to meet the least glorious Frenchwomen in Shanghai, you've only got to go for a walk there in the evening. They'll be going for a walk there, too. . . ."

"I'll go."

"But don't judge Babylon from its street-walkers. There are other things about it, too."

"So I see," I murmured. "There's all the creative genius of the Whites. The only question is whether Shanghai, just like Paris, London, Berlin, New York, and Buenos Aires, isn't teaching the Coloured nowadays that all this marvellous genius of the Whites has, as its ultimate result, the prostitution of Woman. . . . Those poor fellow-countrywomen of mine, the street-walkers on the Bund, can tell me what they think about it."

"What they'll say to you," said Marcel, "is: 'Coming, dearie?' "

CHAPTER XXIII

“ONE FRENCHMAN THE LESS, ONE FRENCHWOMAN THE MORE?”

THE door, bearing a plate in Chinese characters, seemed as though it were locked. Still, I knocked.

“Come in!” a voice cried in French—a voice a bit cracked, but still strong.

Inside the little office an old gentleman in a black jacket was writing. By dint of living in China his skin had yellowed and his eyes were wrinkled. Pure Frenchman though he was, he now looked more Asiatic than many a real Mandarin.

Apart from this, his fragility, erect though he held himself, clearly showed that he had always worked with his “nut,” as the chansonnier Martini puts it, rather than with his brawn. As a matter of fact, he belonged, like Nachbaur, Monestier, Moresthe, and Haag, to the hard-working, unassuming body of French journalists in the Far East.

“Good day, my dear colleague,” I said to him respectfully.

“Oh, delighted, delighted!” said he, in a rather tart tone of voice. It implied, quite clearly:

“Another of these dilettantes who disembark here to criticise everything and misunderstand everything. . . .”

He added sarcastically:

“You might put down that fat book you’re carrying under your arm.”

“I value it,” I explained. “It’s a present I’ve just received from an Englishman, in return for six dollars.”

“Oh, it’s the *Shanghai Directory*, eh?”

“I’m engaged in discovering Shanghai.”

My bantering host settled his glasses on his nose.

“Yes, you’re just at the age for making discoveries,” he remarked. “And what about it, Monsieur? You’ve visited the International Concession?”

“I’ve been done the honours of it. A remarkable place, obviously.”

“Chapei and the modern Chinese quarters to the north, where they’ve just been fighting?”

“Japanese headquarters gave me all the passes I wanted. They’ve got some fine ruins there.”

“Nantao, the old Chinese city to the south?”

“An obliging, well-educated Chinaman, named Zao, took me through its alleys. In fifty yards I was able to think myself sunk in seven centuries of dirt.”

“Yes, it’s a bit behind the times. And Saint George and Hungjao, the Greater Shanghai of Progressive China?”

“That pleasant fellow the mayor, His Excellency General Wu-Teh-Tshen, was careful to point its huge building plots out to me himself. It was after an excellent Chinese lunch, at which, for that matter, I ‘lost face’ by upsetting a saucerful of rotten fish sauce with my chop-sticks.”

“That was silly of you. . . . Have you seen Shanghai from the summit of the Longhwa pagoda?”

“Mr. Keng, the very intelligent secretary to the Chinese town council, helped me to climb that venerable staircase, white with bird-droppings. And from the topmost balcony I saw——”

“You saw what?”

"The old horned roofs of the temple. . . . A few scaffoldings. . . . In the distance, plains, the Wangpu river shining in the sun, and then the hazy atmosphere of the great cosmopolitan city, with the towers of our cathedral sticking out of it."

"Good. You're beginning to know your way about. And——"

"The French Concession?" I finished for him. "Well, I've been keeping that for a titbit."

He stiffened in his chair, contemptuous and provocative.

"Oh, really? And you've got a guide, I suppose?"

"I came to ask you to pilot me. . . ."

"I? But, Monsieur, I've been living in the French Concession of Shanghai for the past forty years. . . ."

"That's just why. . . ."

"How odd! . . . Newcomers generally think that I know it only too well. They address themselves to anybody else, rather than to me."

"I'm the exception. Will you take me?"

"All right. But by rickshaw. I hate motor-cars."

"By rickshaw, provided my *Directory* will fit into it."

"Monsieur, a real Shanghai rickshaw-runner wouldn't refuse to take even the *Encyclopaedia*, or a cannon, or an elephant."

We set off one behind the other, in two rickshaws drawn by two hilarious but lousy runners. My cicerone went on ahead. From time to time he waved his rather trembling hand. His thin voice came back to me through the hubbub of the streets.

"When I first came here, in 1890, this was all swamp. . . ."

For my part, lying back and craning my neck—happily the macadam spared me any jolting—I looked right and left at the ornate, monumental buildings: luxurious private houses, big shops, rich hotels.

A throng of lorries, limousines, buses, and tram-cars glided in between the rows of plane-trees, under the control of policemen in blue tunics, just the same as in Paris. These wide roadways, constructed at right angles to one another, went on for kilometre after kilometre: all built up, clean, splendid, animated, European.

"And what about here?" I cried. "Still the French Concession?"

"Look at that," replied the Shanghai Frenchman, pointing to some house-front showing a flag which might be faded, but was still the tricolour.

So we rolled on. It seemed endless.

"The avenue Joffre: six kilometres long. It was born out of a short riding-track, which ended amid unhealthy ponds and old tombs."

"The rue Lafayette in Paris is no finer."

"We have a rue Lafayette, too, and there are thirteen hundred numbers in it. . . . The boulevard Montigny: used to be a network of pestilential rivulets. . . . The boulevard des Deux-Républiques: once upon a time, more rivulets, and the rubbish-dump of the Chinese city. . . ."

"Really? And now I see a French scent-shop."

"Here's the avenue Edouard-VII."

"It's almost like the avenue de l'Opéra,"

"Well, it used to be worse than anywhere else. . . . A creek of the Wangpu, a cess-pool of stagnant water, a sink where the slack-water of the river served as a flush for the closet of the people living on the banks. . . ."

"All French doing, this cleaning up? The mere idea of it brings my heart into my mouth."

“Well, the English of Nankin and Peking Road did what they could do prevent us from finishing it.”

“And why?”

“They’re like that. They don’t love their neighbours!”

“So you, like good Christians, baptised your avenue with the name of King Edward the Boulevardier. . . .”

“That sums up the whole *Entente cordiale*.”

“Let’s stop for a moment, please,” I cried.

The runners came to a standstill at a majestic cross-road. “All French, all French,” repeated my fellow-countryman, pointing to the four vistas to be seen from here, one after the other. I felt something like the admiration of the king conducted by Puss-in-Boots through the domains of Carabas. But nobody was bluffing me: this was all authentic.

“At the very beginning, in 1849, the Concession was limited to fifty hectares of swamp, together with a few wicker-huts and bad roads,” my guide summed up, quite simply. “The Chinese gave it to us by way of a joke. . . . Later on they were glad enough to grant us extensions: it had already become their place of refuge. . . . At this moment we have 1022 hectares, developed as you can see for yourself, 101 kilometres of streets, 45,000 houses, and a budget of nine million taels—the tael is worth eight francs. . . . As for public foundations: schools, hospitals, institutes, laboratories, and also business firms and factories, it would take a book to describe them to you, and a fat one.”

“Ah, excuse me for a moment,” I exclaimed, and I pulled that precious *Directory* out from under the seat of my rickshaw. Now was just the time for it. The list of addresses in it was preceded by an article about Shanghai—in English, of course.

“The International Settlement (British, American, and Japanese concessions combined),” I translated, “rivals the greatest capitals of the world in activity, wealth, and importance. It is the centre of business for the whole of China, and, with its innumerable factories, the real capital of industrialism in Asia. . . .”

“Quite so,” the veteran agreed, though this lofty patter made him smile. “The Bund, Bubbling Well, Nankin Road, Yangtsepoo, and Pootung opposite, are *also* a splendid, gigantic achievement. . . . An achievement of English patience and American enterprise, to which a hand has sometimes been lent by Frenchmen who adventured outside our own Concession.”

“Let’s see about our own Concession,” said I; and I read as follows:

“ ‘The French part is a narrow strip of ground between the International Settlement and the native quarters. It contains a few business houses and a few wharves, mainly devoted to coast-wise trade. But it is principally a residential and pleasure district.’ . . . That’s all!”

My companion nodded.

“The English never like us to be taken too seriously. But the whole world might underestimate the magnificent work we have done in Shanghai, and still I shouldn’t mind so much, if only, *in France at least*, they realised what we possess here.”

“But doesn’t France know?”

“Did you know, before you came here? In France they are beginning to know what Indo-China means. But as for the French Concession in Shanghai, this city which resembles Paris. . . . Ask any hundred Parisians—I won’t even say any hundred peasants—if they know even that it exists, and what idea they have about it.”

I hailed a fine young Chinese clerk who was going along beside my rickshaw, wearing a black robe and carrying an umbrella. I begged him, by signs, to accept the

British *Directory*, whose love for France I had just found out. He accepted this present of mine, and we made each other any number of bows.

"I have seen," I went on, "what China has done with Shanghai in ten thousand years. And I have seen what the most powerful White nations in association with Japan have done between the three of them. And now I see what my own country has done, all by herself, while she was very much occupied elsewhere, in between the two terrible upheavals of 1870 and 1914. I certainly feel very proud of being a Frenchman."

My mentor made no reply. He was seized by a fit of coughing which distressed me.

"That fine house in front of us, enclosed within walls as though it were in the faubourg Saint-Germain," he said at length, "is the property of a Chinese millionaire, an ex-coolie who became the opium-smuggling king."

"Oh, indeed?" And to whom does that building on the opposite corner belong?"

"To the General U. and E. . . ."

"An English or American company?"

"Not at all: French—legally French. . . . Together with the Forethought, the Trustworthy, and others, it's one of those estate companies that share among themselves all the finest properties in the Concession."

"But why have they got English names?"

"You'd better ask their directors and their shareholders."

"But surely they're all French, if the companies themselves are?"

"Monsieur, I can't deliver a lecture to you about limited liability company legislation . . . more especially as it is applied in Shanghai."

"Hum!" said I. "By the way, wasn't the ground originally in the hands of France, as concessionaire?"

"Our municipality itself retroceded these plots."

"Doubtless to deserving Frenchmen who had struggled on the spot during the hard, creative times?"

"In some cases. But, as the Frenchmen in question had more courage than business instinct, and also because the struggle had exhausted them, they sold their rights . . . for a few mouthfuls of bread, one might almost say. Besides, all our fellow-countrymen aren't born creators, or born heroes, either. I take off my hat to the Chinese, English, Esquimaux or Zulu capitalists who looked ahead and who now possess, in this concession of ours, properties valued at millions of taels. You know what international finance is in America and in Europe?"

"I know a bit about it," I murmured.

"In China it's the same thing, *plus China*."

"I understand," said I. "But still, a few Frenchmen have made their fortunes in Shanghai, haven't they?"

"Yes, by leaving Shanghai. They made their fortunes by abdicating."

"And what about those who refuse to abdicate?"

"They have a fine monument on the Bund, *ad mortuorum gloriam*, and some graves in our cemeteries," said my guide, rubbing his glasses. "Later on I'll take you to see a big funeral in Shanghai. . . . One more!"

"Then at this moment," I asked, "how many French inhabitants are there in this Concession of ours, thus . . . renovated?"

"Fourteen hundred, of whom three hundred are officials."

"And how many foreigners?"

"Nineteen thousand Whites, and half a million Yellows."

We were on the point of getting back into our rickshaws. I did not look at this corner, these buildings, with the same eyes any longer. I did not feel at home any more.

"That reminds me," I said. "Somebody quoted me a quip that was let fall by one of these financiers of yours. Having swindled us, he hates us into the bargain. He was referring to women residents not reckoned in your statistics: residents who are recruited for Asia, in France, by fellows who rhyme withimps. . . . And this was how, in terms of his hatred, he defined the future of the Concession: '*One Frenchman the less, one Frenchwoman the more!* . . .' Was he right?"

The old man squared his shoulders like a young man.

"Never!" he cried indignantly, amid the concert of klaxons. "There are still some of us left, alive and kicking. We'll fight all over again, we'll have a fresh clean-up. . . ."

"Does the danger spring from Consular autonomy?" I persisted.

"Not at all! Quite the contrary. That's the only thing which has enabled us to hold out so far. I hope the Mother Country will always send us strong Consuls. And I hope she will let them act in agreement with us, the real witnesses. The mistake, the disaster, is that in Paris they don't know anything about Shanghai, I tell you again. Except for a few people, who know only too much . . ."

"And I imagine that they are far from facilitating the task of the Consul."

"They paralyse it, if not worse. . . . Let's go to the Consulate."

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM OFFICIAL SHANGHAI TO THE DREGS

OUTSIDE the low, decrepit villa which, in the sumptuous French Concession of Shanghai, serves as shelter for the Consulate-General of France, and indeed for the administration, I now felt something like anger.

"Why should this building be so out of date, so poverty-stricken, when we retain at least nominal authority over half of Babylon?" I demanded. "Why haven't we rebuilt it in imperial style like the Japanese Consulate, given it five floors like the German Consulate, or six like the Soviet Consulate, or even turned it into a skyscraper like the Hotel Cathay?"

"That, no doubt, would be a convenience to the administration, and also an assertion of our prestige, which would be far from spendthrift," replied my guide, rather bitterly. "But the floors which are missing here were perhaps constructed elsewhere to the advantage of clever citizens. . . . At this moment, the Mother Country would certainly have to pay a stiff price if she discarded the policy of humility. . . ."

"I should very much like," I cut in, "to know the secret history of this policy, especially between 1910 and 1930, during the period when the budget of the Concession rose from 1,300,000 taels to eight millions and a half."

All at once I felt suffocated. My eyes filled with tears. We were just entering the offices of the Consulate. The atmosphere in them was flavoured with a pungent antiseptic which attacked your throat and your eyeballs. All the scribblers there were crying and coughing.

"What the plague is this?" I gasped.

"They'll tell you as a matter of fact," my initiator articulated, as best he could, "that it's precisely after a case of plague that they're disinfecting the house. It's possible that there may be microbes in the air, thanks to the frightful herd of Chinese refugees who have been driven back upon us by the Japanese bombardment. But when all the guests at one and the same meal are taken ill, when four of them die, and when this happens to coincide with the climax of a struggle for influence, in which one hitherto favoured Chinese group has just 'lost face' . . ."

"Well?"

"Then, for my part, I recall that in China cooking is an exquisite art. You regale yourself, and they poison you. . . ."

"Why, I'll never be able to eat at peace any more!"

"My dear sir, it's pure hypothesis! Bear that in mind, though, as an element in affairs of State, not to be despised in this picturesque country. In the avenue Joffre you might think yourself in Paris. But Nantao, the Chinese city, is only a few yards away—in other words, the pure Middle Ages, ferocious when they're defending themselves or revenging themselves. . . ."

Our conversation was interrupted. The new Consul, M. Meyrier, welcomed us. He was in ceremonial attire, for he was about to head the funeral procession of one of the victims of the fatal luncheon. His predecessor, M. Koechlin, had been one of the guests; he had sailed for France, and died at Hong-Kong. M. du Pac de Marsoulies and M. Haardt, a passing guest, were also dead. Colonel Macaire had just died. It was uncertain whether the Minister, M. Wilden, would survive. The Borgias did no better. . . . Pure hypothesis, of course; let us be diplomats.

"When you talk about the Concession," M. Meyrier said to me of his own accord, "don't be afraid to say that a certain period of abuses is over; and we won't tolerate its coming back."

"I'll hand on what you say," I promised. "I'm very glad to hear it, and I'll do my best to see that no red-tape thwarts you."

Then we went to bury the poor colonel. The procession formed up in the big gardens of the Sainte-Marie Hospital, still a French institution. It was the only time when I saw the Whites in Shanghai standing shoulder to shoulder. Behind the French Consul, one of our admirals and one of our generals, marched all the dignitaries of the International Settlement: the officials of Great Britain, Germany, the United States, Italy and Portugal. And with our *Marsouins* leading, the Tommies and the Sammies, the soldiers of all the different nations whose flags flew on the Wangpu, followed with rifles reversed, or flanked the route to the cemetery.

This ceremonial was moving for us Whites. But the Chinese massed along the pavements made fun of it.

"Alas, they don't believe any more that the foreign devils are capable of uniting, except to honour a coffin," one of the young chiefs of the French police lamented to me. The crowd had separated me from my venerable cicerone and brought me alongside him.

"But in the interests of China herself, surely unity among the Whites is more important to-day than ever," I ventured.

"Of course it is. . . . And it has never been more of a dream."

This fresh meeting of ours came just at the right moment. Back in Indo-China, I had been recommended to get in touch with this young police officer, if I wanted to study Shanghai in its depths. I had been to question him a little at his headquarters in the rue Stanislas Chevalier: a street which would grace the Vaugirard district of Paris. But there he had answered me in purely official strain. In other words, he had observed the reasoning: "Every inquirer is blind at the outset. . . . Why not leave his eyes shut?"

"Well," I had asked him on that first occasion, "what about the policing of the Concession?"

"Oh, perfect—absolutely perfect!"

"And prostitution?"

"So little of it that it's not worth talking about any more. . . ."

"And gambling? I've been told that the Chinese are terrible gamblers."

"Finished. We've shut up all the gambling hells."

"And opium?"

"That's our greatest credit. No more dens. French Shanghai is, in all Asia, the city where there is least drug-taking. . . . Just a few hard cases, of course. . . ."

"That's wonderful," said I. "But how do people amuse themselves when they're bored?"

"Why . . . they work, Monsieur. Or else they dance. By the way, have you tried the marvellous rubber dance-floor at the French Club? Metal girders serve as springs. You feel just as though you had wings."

"So all the dancers become angels. I see!"

Since that first lesson, we had got together better. As a matter of fact, only too many pseudo-journalists are infernal drones, in the eyes of the man of action grappling with the difficulties of his job. The man of action is quite right to keep his secrets to himself.

"The poor colonel was good company," sighed my new companion, when we had all filed past the grave. "How sad to die so far away from France!"

"Don't let it depress you."

"No, one mustn't. One should do the same as aviators, who go up again as soon as they have saluted a fallen comrade. . . . Let's go and have an *apéritif* at the Club. Then we might dine at Katchenko's, the best Russian restaurant, in the avenue Joffre. There's a good dance-floor there, too. . . ."

Cocktails, dinner, and music drove away our melancholy, and made my young police-superintendent much more cordial. But he still retained his official mask.

"What about a run round the night-haunts?" he suggested. "For a visitor like yourself, it's the thing to do. You'll see: the conventions are observed everywhere. There are plenty of 'taxi-girls,' American style; you buy a book of tickets, and you give one for each dance to the partner you choose. But you're not allowed to drink with them, and, above all, you're not allowed to take them outside. When the dance-hall closes, a special bus takes them all home. So good morals are obligatory. . . ."

Shanghai by night streamed with electric signs. Cars sped over the asphalt. Ours put us down at the "Casanova," in the splendid avenue Edouard-VII.

"One of the most fashionable cabarets," my pilot told me. "It belongs to a Chinese woman, Miss Lei-Tao."

This Yellow woman reigned over some very lovely White women. The taxi-girls at the "Casanova" were obviously Russians, half-naked, poured into their evening frocks: milk-white flesh, snaky figures, faces of goddesses indescribably sad or perverse. They were indeed the Sonias of romance!

As they passed us they smiled at the tall police officer. But he did not invite any of them, and, out of tact, I did not dance either. I remarked that several of the gentlemen dancing were Chinese.

"They're admitted. But only in European dress."

"You mean to say they're not admitted in those ancestral silk cassocks of theirs?"

"No, not here. In that case they go to places a little less strict, especially on the fringes of the Concessions. The 'Del Monte' in Douglas Haig Avenue, for example."

"Could I have a look in there?"

"Yes, why not?"

We transferred ourselves to the "Del Monte." The girls there were no less White, no less ravishing. To the strains of the universal jazz they revolved in the arms of Yellows in long robes or in national uniform.

"These Chinese seem to dance a lot," I remarked.

"Oh, yes, the Asiatic clientele is the main one in the night-haunts. . . . At the 'Majestic' at the 'Blue Bird,' and in many other places, you'll also see Chinese taxi-girls. They and the Siberian girls compete with one another. . . ."

"And the most obliging wins. . . . In other words, the one who doesn't confine her favours to a fox-trot?"

"Of course not. What an idea! . . ."

"Do you really mean to tell me," I asked, as we went down an illuminated staircase again, "that there isn't a single White woman in Shanghai who's mercenary?"

"Well, there are some, of course," my guide admitted, laughing despite himself.

Then he slapped me on the back recklessly.

"You really want to see the dregs—the real dregs?"

"I want to see everything."

"Then come to the rue Chu-Pao-San."

It was right beside the French Consulate: a street of bar-brothels for sailors. If you are familiar with the rue de la Grosse-Tonne in le Havre, add to it a few beggars and Chinese “boys,” heighten the cosmopolitanism of the seamen, imagine that pungent odour of highly-spiced corruption which is the odour of all China—and you have some idea of the worthy rue Chu-Pao-San.

A whistle-blast rallied two police scouts to us—one Tonkinese, the other Russian. They opened the doors for us rapidly, and then effaced themselves. Our appearance made the musicians falter, and brought the landladies running up through the smoke in which couples were swaying. They were grateful that we were not raiding them. . .

So we inspected the “Tip-Top,” the “Rabbit,” the “Charleston,” the “Fantasio,” the “Ritz”—no less!—and I don’t know how many other places.

“You see,” my tall policeman told me politely, “I’m not hiding anything from you. But it’s orderly, isn’t it, and well run? You must have that sort of thing, the same as in all ports.”

“And here,” I admitted, “at least, White women sell themselves only to Whites.”

“To the crews of liners and naval guard-ships. Now, I ask you: you’ve seen those poor women, often middle-aged, degraded, burned up with alcohol, brutalised. . . . And those young men, athletic, tanned golden, who come here to pay for them. Don’t you think that the beauty is to be found in the men, not in the women? They’re lucky that such fine fellows should deign to touch them.”

“That’s true,” I murmured. “And still, they’re women. . . . So that’s the dregs of Shanghai, is it, this rue Chu-Pao-San?”

He nodded; but I wasn’t convinced.

“You want to see some more dirty corners, do you?” he went on, now quite humanised. “Do you remember that superb Siberian girl, the platinum blonde, in a green tunic, who came to speak to me at the ‘Casanova’?”

“Yes, I admired her.”

“She’s a little friend of mine. And there’s a friend of hers, no less blonde. They’re free to-night; and so am I. What about you?”

“But . . . what about that bus of yours which takes all these virginal taxi-girls home to mamma?”

“To-night, I believe, as it happens, it isn’t running.”

So the avenue Edouard-VII saw us again. It was just the time when this first-class dance-hall closed. Pell-mell, the Russian girls and the clients, White or Chinese, who had kept them plied with tickets all evening poured out under the porch. I was quite sure that they would not part without having another drink

The Olympian creature draped in green awaited us on the flight of steps. She declined offers from gentlemen of all colours. And, to hold her back too, she put her arm round a second Venus: this one in a red frock.

“How does this sample of Siberia strike you, traveller?”

“If Siberia is really like this, I envy the bears and the convicts. . . .”

CHAPTER XXV

WHITE SLAVE HELL IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONCESSION

I WAS introduced: "Aliocha, Natacha." They might just as well have called themselves Sonia, like so many others.

Aliocha was already—no doubt about it—on intimate terms with my companion. She invoked his protection against some police persecution or other, and the situation between them needed no further discussion. He escorted her home.

Natacha looked me up and down with that imperial air which they have managed to preserve, these Aphrodites of the North, even in the depths of ignominy.

"I don't know you," she told me.

"True."

"Well, then, I suppose you don't think you can treat a respectable Russian girl like a bitch the first time you see her?"

"Mademoiselle, I can assure you that nothing is further from my thoughts. . . ."

"Very good. In that case, I forgive you and I will allow you to take me to dance in a nightclub."

"Just as the midshipmen told me," I said to myself.

"They're all like that," the doorkeeper whispered to me. Very reasonably, he was only anxious to see the backs of us. "But in a couple of hours, perhaps, she'll take you home with a high hand. . . . Meanwhile, don't let yourself get annoyed, see? And look out for your note-case where you're going. . . . Anyhow, Natacha knows that I'm recommending you: so she'll see you don't get into trouble."

"Thanks," I replied. "I've come to Shanghai to see life. So I'm delighted that Natacha is taking me out, instead of taking me home. . . ."

The Siberian girl had overheard the last couple of sentences. When we were alone together in a taxi, on our way towards one of those haunts which do not shut till dawn, she repeated:

"So you've come to Shanghai to see life?"

Her tone, in the Anglo-Franco-German jargon she spoke, shouted hostility and contempt at me. I tried to explain the humanitarian interest of my inquiry to her; and—an incredible thing if she had been anything except a Slav woman—I managed to do so almost at once. But she transposed my French point of view in accordance with her own Russian mysticism.

"You want to know how deep the women of my race can sink into suffering?" she cried, with a kind of morbid joy. "Well, I'll show you the worst thing of all for White women, the vilest thing: their Hell. I'd rather do that than drive myself to go to bed with you. . . ."

"I assure you——"

"Have you been taken there already—into the underworld?"

"I've just been to the rue Chu-Pao-San."

"That's nothing. There the men are White. The most wretched women in Shanghai have only Yellows for their clients. They're to be found in the International Concession, or in Chapei."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that. If the French Concession had beaten all records for vice I should have been surprised, and pained, too. For my country, with all its false reputation for immorality, knows how to steer clear of such excesses as sadism much better than the doctrinaire peoples."

Natacha gave an order to the chauffeur in Chinese. He sped full speed along the wide, and now deserted, streets of the International Settlement. All these banks, all these market-places. . . . It was certainly Babylon, and London, Berlin, New York, all this ultra-sophisticated Asia.

All at once we pulled up sharply at the corner of a street still dazzling with multi-coloured lamps, on which Chinese characters, dragons and moons were sketched. The Asiatic crowd swarmed here as though it were high noon. I was reminded of the red-light district of Cairo, El Ouassa, which never goes to sleep either.

"We'll have to go on foot. This is Foochow Road, the major intestine of Chinese gay life," my conductress told me.

The taxi waited for us. We pushed our way through people in robes. They laughed at the sight of a European degrading himself in their midst. But Natacha "saved face" for me by returning sarcasm for their mockery in their own pleasant language. So, after all, it was only behind my back that they spat at me. . . .

Then, in the middle of Foochow Road, in between illuminated tea-houses, I set eyes on the company, the regiment, the column, of Chinese males who were making their way along under continual attack from a twofold army of females. There was one battalion on the left-hand pavement, and another on the right-hand pavement: an army perpetually refreshed by reinforcements from the side-streets.

Those side-streets, those shadowy, candle-ends of lanes—I imagine they concealed dens of thieves as much as carnal pleasures. In any case, they didn't smell good to me. . . .

But, in sober truth, nowhere, in any part of the world, had I ever before seen such an assault, so multiple, so desperate an assault, and at the same time such a beseeching one, such a servile and cringing one, of Eve the prostitute upon Adam. These Adams were true Sons of Heaven: Chinese, either without expression, or else smiling cruelly. . . . They were delighted, no doubt, to be solicited, to be pestered like this by this herd of girls. What was a girl in China? Not so very long ago they used to eat them. . . .

A herd, a pack—and a worrying one, clinging like flies, like leeches: such were all these sinners. There wasn't just one of them to the square yard—there were dozens, scores of them, massed under the eyes and the whips of drovers more robust, but no less ugly.

The great majority of these Eves were Yellow, or greenish, or of the half-breed hue of some part of the Tropics. Some of them were almost White; but they were Mongols or Koreans. Still, this was not all. Here, when I created a "sensation," where I was the sole man of the West—here I could hear words belonging to my own Europe, spoken by women who were foreigners in Asia.

"Coming, dearie?" these voices clamoured in French—just as Marcel the lawyer had told me. And I could hear, too, German voices: "*Komm, mein Schatz*. . . ."; English voices: "Just for a bit. . . ."

"What?" I asked Natacha, who was pulling me along. "Really White women here, in Foochow Road, at this time of night?"

"Here?" she retorted fiercely. "Anything you like. Do you want children? Do you want monstrosities? You can have them by the shipload. Do you want opium? Just smell—every second house is an opium-den. . . ."

Indeed, amid the general stench, I could sniff the familiar perfume of burned almond.

"I've been told that opium has gone out of fashion in Shanghai."

"Shanghai smokes more than fifty thousand pipes a day. . . . There's any amount of morphine, and heroin. . . . Or would you rather gamble?"

She led me up a steep staircase, whose treads were made of glass. Upstairs I saw a number of rooms, full of Chinese punters falling over one another to stake at roulette or fantan.

"A 'tec!" the Yellow doorkeeper cried at the sight of me, in the purest intonation of Montmartre.

We went back to our taxi.

"Elsewhere on the Soochow Creek quays, in Chapoo and North Szechuen Road, you'll find the White women who have sunk the lowest of all. . . . To serve as a plaything to the Chinese isn't so bad, after all; they're amorous, and they're artists. *But the Japanese!* They really hate our race. We're repugnant to them. They only want to trample us under foot, to defile us. . . ."

I thought she was exaggerating. But, in that new district where the International Settlement joins on to Chapei, I was assailed myself by sorrowful pity. I had not the heart to smile any more, from the very first dreary den into which she took me.

Such faces, such voices, such wrecks in those brothels! And, after all, they were White women: they spoke Russian, English, French. They clamoured for cigarettes. They ventured to specify that they "wouldn't want much," just as their infinitely more prosperous sisters in the boulevard de la Madeleine in Paris do. . . .

All round, on the quays of the Creek crowded with sampans, in the streets gutted by airplane bombs and still barred by barbed-wire and sandbags, groups of Japanese soldiers were patrolling. Several times over I had to show my pass. They took themselves off; but they laughed rudely among themselves.

I felt that, as Natacha has promised, I had got down to the lowest cesspool. In the whole Road to Shanghai, no worse dead-end could exist.

I wanted some respite, some relaxation, some consoling sight which would put me into good spirits again. But the inexorable Natacha would not spare me anything.

"And here, too . . . Fearon Road . . . The 'Venus Bar.' "

"Glorious Venus—how they profane thee!"

The sign was a flamboyant one. The front was a whitewashed wall.

"It used to be the court-yard of a Chinese *yamen*. They've roofed it with old petrol-tins."

"That must be nice. . . ."

It was even better. Bamboos made up a trellis, from which hung clusters of artificial grapes. At the end of the dance-hall was daubed a gigantic naked woman, pure White. Other White women, real women, horribly done up and undressed, were drinking, dancing and offering themselves at the behest of a clientele exclusively Yellow. At such a time, and in such a neighbourhood, the only people, together with Japanese, who could come here to amuse themselves were Japanese supporters: hangers-on from Formosa, Korea and Manchuria, port stevedores and canteen-men of the Japanese Expeditionary Force.

I wanted to get out, but Natacha made me sit down at one of the tables. From the hostile glances of my neighbours, as well as from the dull surprise of the prostitutes, I could tell that my presence scandalised everybody. I was encroaching upon the right of possession conquered by these men of Colour.

"It must be a long time since a White man came in here," I murmured.

The Siberian girl burst out laughing.

"Why, the owner is a Frenchman!" she cried, as though by way of insulting me.

Then she laid one of her hands on mine.

“But it isn’t his fault. It isn’t Monsieur R—— himself who sells these Russian fellow-countrywomen of mine here to Japanese coolies and brutes. . . . He’s a slave himself. He’s kind, he’s charitable; but he’s weak. The tyrant here is that Harbin Jewess he married. . . .”

I followed the motion of Natacha’s execrating hand. Behind the orchestra platform, at a counter which guarded the staircase to the bedrooms and the staircase to the cellar, I could make out, through the haze, a virago. She, too, was White: even pallid under her tawny wig. All I could see was her bust—a big-breasted block. Her still more monstrous proportions were hidden from me by the counter.

“Here’s Monsieur R——,” exclaimed Natacha.

He came towards us—this Frenchman of Fearon Road. A “boy” must have told him, in the back-office where the Megaera kept him prisoner, about this extraordinary visit of a European. He came towards us, poor Monsieur R——, with all the prudence of an old cat, keeping close to the wall lest he should disturb the Yellow merry-makers. He smiled upon them through his spectacles.

Monsieur R——: imagine a musical comedy family solicitor, short-sighted and sentimental. He carried off the palm, I’ll warrant you. His cranium, duly provided with all the bumps of kindness, was surrounded by a nimbus of playful grey hair, the sure mark of a cheerful, affectionate nature.

“What are you doing in this galley?” I asked him as he all but fell upon my neck.

He raised his infantile blue eyes to the imitation grapes.

“If only I had the courage to run away! To get a divorce!”

Then he ordered himself to Natacha. He was transfigured, as though in ecstasy.

“Some day soon, perhaps. . . . Well, my little pigeon, and how is my dear Sofia?”

At the “Venus Bar,” in the depths of Hell, I had discovered the idyll which, there as elsewhere, compensated for the desperate hideousness of life.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE “VENUS BAR’S” GUARDIAN ANGEL AND DOSTOIEVSKY’S GRAND-NIECES

THE next day I dined with Sofia herself—Monsieur R——’s beloved Sofia—at Natacha’s, in a little furnished flat in the avenue Joffre.

“Monsieur R—— promised us he’d come, at least for dessert,” Natacha said.

“But will he come?” asked the other Russians.

“No, he won’t dare to break away. That Jewess has got him under her thumb. He’s a man who’s finished. . . .”

Sofia said nothing at all. She just waited, smiling mysteriously.

She was not a blonde, like most Siberian women, but a brunette: tall, rather statuesque, with a broad, calm face and, so to speak, all the weight of centuries of neurasthenia on her thirty years’ old head. She was like the Egyptian Sphinx—in process of meditating upon the Muscovite *nitchevo*.

Like all her sisters, she had exiled herself from starveling Harbin to seek a livelihood in China. She had been all over the place, more or less: notably in one of those Russian clubs in Canton of which I had caught a glimpse with Margot.

Afterwards Fate had flung her back to Shanghai. There things went badly with her. Falling lower and lower, she had sunk to the wretched cabarets in Fearon Road. There she had prostituted herself with low-class Yellows, under the rod of procuresses like Mme R——, until she met Monsieur R—— and he found in her his soul-mate.

It was an odd love-alliance, between this greying, lawyer-like Frenchman and this incurably sad Slav girl of Asia. But Monsieur R——’s marriage to the Jewess of the “Venus Bar” was no less startling.

What strange adventures must have led this decent man into such a slavery—though without making him forget his violet ribbon or his simple sensitiveness of heart! For Monsieur R—— had a heart of gold. Condemned to live amid the degradation of White women, he comforted them and protected them to the best of his ability. A guardian angel, indeed! And he had saved one of them: Sofia.

Thanks to him, she had got out of the Gehenna of Chapei, and returned to the soil of our Concession in an unhopd-for state of independence. Out of gratitude—and through her Russian pride—she had let him become her lover.

He worshipped her like a goddess. He could scarcely ever see her. The Jewess kept him shut up, prevented him from working outside, and doled out pocket-money to him parsimoniously. But everything he could lay hands on he sent to Sofia to make her happy—pending widowerhood or divorce, and the joy of being united to her. You see how idyllic Shanghai can be. . . .

My quite accidental visit to the “Venus Bar” certainly galvanised this gentle, timid man into life. Natacha told me his story, in his presence; and I could not help saying to him, instinctively:

“But why do you stay here? Get out of this prison of yours. Make a man of yourself again. . . .”

On the spot he gave an unexpected proof of strength of character which stupefied the whole “Venus Bar.” Despite the belated hour, I had to telephone to the Hotel Cathay, to a very official personage. The idea of his hearing the hubbub of a night-haunt through the receiver annoyed me. Thereupon Monsieur R—— sprang to his feet, waving his glasses martially. Raising his thin arms, he imposed silence upon the musi-

cians. Even the arrogant Japanese, even the drunken Siberian girls, even the terrible Jewess herself—all of them kept quiet, moon-struck by his ceremonial solemnity, while I obtained my diplomatic conversation.

Then, when we left that frightful dance-hall, shaking hands with us excitedly once more, Monsieur R—— promised Natacha:

“To-morrow, I’m coming to see Sofia, at any cost. . . .”

Would he come? While we waited for him, we dined just as though we were in Moscow. First *zakouskys*—complete with vodka—then *bortch*, then beef *à la* Stroganoff. I found myself in the midst of the Russia of Shanghai. After knowing this environment from hearsay, after seeing it from the outside, I was now plunged right into it.

Opposite me was sitting a woman of forty, with a virile face, seared with passion, under her very short mahogany-coloured hair. A mannish jacket moulded her bust. With her chin held high by a stiff collar, she looked at the men with indifference, and at the women as a man might look at them.

“Tania is the descendent of a famous Russian writer,” my polite hostess Natacha whispered to me. “She served in Wrangel’s army. In fact, she was awarded the Saint George’s cross. She comes from Russia-in-Europe. And nobody could sympathise with us Siberian refugees better than she could; for, as you can guess for yourself, masculine love is repugnant to her. . . .”

“Has she been in Shanghai long?”

“Oh, yes, since long before me. She was still quite well off when she came. She used her money to help any number of girls. When she had none left, she accepted an American lover; he gave her five thousand dollars a month, and she spent it all on charity among her friends. Then Tania started a cabaret. But she never liked seeing any harm come to the dancing-girls, so she soon went bankrupt. To-day, sometimes she finds a job, and then she’s spendthrift again. Sometimes she hasn’t got a dollar, and then, in our turn, we share what we have with her.”

“Not a story to be ashamed of,” I murmured.

Tania realised that we were talking about her and the past.

“Until 1926,” she told me across the table, “very few Siberian girls risked themselves in China. They were afraid, and with good reason. Then the defeat of Koltchak’s last lieutenants drove them desperate. They set off for Shanghai, with the object, above all, of earning bank-notes to send to their sick parents, the old people they had left behind starving in Harbin or Vladivostok. These first trips of theirs proved a frightful disappointment. The most beautiful of them gave themselves to vile Chinese, just for the price of a railway ticket or a bedroom. . . .”

“At that time most Chinese would not even touch White women,” the only male guest besides myself confirmed bitterly. He was a Russian of the old regime, now a detective in the service of the Anti-Kidnapping Society.

Tania’s ravaged face flamed with retrospective indignation.

“Yes, what a shame it was! Adolescent blondes mingled in the streets with troops of hideous Yellow prostitutes, just to get something to eat. And the coolies refused to go to bed with them. Then they held their robes open, so that the men could see that they really were women. They managed to live on the alms of men like that only because they had stupefied them for evermore by their shamelessness. Among the Chinese, henceforth, White women had the reputation of doing what no Yellow woman would ever do.”

"Some of them put up a struggle," said the detective. "They worked; they went as servants. They slept in pigsties by the dozen. Then the period of the dance-halls started. . . ."

"And now we can avenge our elder sisters on the Mandarins!" cried a very pretty damsel, who was leaning affectionately towards Tania.

"That's Katia," whispered my precious informant Natacha. "Her looks have brought her luck. She's twenty-seven. She was born in Harbin, like me, too, she *ranks as Chinese by nationality*."

"But Parisian women are no Whiter than you two."

"For that matter, as Katia was educated at the French convent in Harbin, she's often let it be understood that she is a Parisian; and in that case, with the Chinese of nowadays, a White woman is worth three times as much."

"I've been told that before."

"As soon as she arrived in Shanghai, Katia was taken on at once in the dearest brothel here, in the rue Lafayette in the French Concession."

"Truly Parisian. . . ."

"It's a discreet little hotel. The owner is an American woman. No women live in the house. Everything is arranged by telephone. The lowest price is fifty dollars. The clients are mostly Chinese business men, bankers and politicians from Nankin. . . . They can always pay. Besides, they're tactful; *they don't ask any questions*. So, apart from women who need money, real Society women in the International Settlement sometimes go there out of curiosity, just to amuse themselves. . . ."

"More Parisian still. . . . And what about Katia's luck?"

"In the rue Lafayette she spent an hour with Mr. W., a very rich English Jew. He'd inherited some of the finest properties in Bubbling Well. He was so smitten with her that he signed a cheque for forty thousand dollars for her on the spot. Then he set her up in a swell hat-shop."

"So Katia doesn't need to hunt men any more?"

"No, but she smokes a lot, and she drugs," the detective told me in a very low voice. "So long as Tania can keep an eye on her, or she simply takes a fancy to some Basque *hai-alai* player, she's out of harm's way. But sometimes she suddenly feels lonesome, solitary, empty. . . . Then she goes and sells herself again in the lowest cabarets just like the poorest prostitutes. She feels a need of sin, of disgust, of expiation. . . ."

"Oh, grand-nieces of Dostoievsky!" I murmured.

Then Natacha herself told me, with touching cynicism:

"When I was a 'taxi-girl' at the 'Del Monte' and the 'Blue Bird,' I often played a trick on those Chinamen bursting with money. To begin with, I made them buy two bottles of champagne, and pay for fifty dollars' worth of tickets, which they handed over to me without having a single dance. In that way I saved tiring myself. Then, when the place closed, I took them to a low bar. Two or three strong cocktails bowled them over. For my part, I'd made a sign to the Russian bar-man and I drank nothing but water. And I left them there, dead-drunk on the bench, without their even defiling me with a kiss. . . ."

"So," I summed up, "the Chinese have discovered the sex-appeal of White women just in these last few years, through a whole process of psycho-physiological evolution. That's a date in history. . . . And now they're capable, just like White men, of squandering their whole fortune on a woman, are they?"

"They might just as well do that as turn their fortune over to bandits, as ransom for being kidnapped," remarked the Russian.

"I take it kidnapping is practised systematically, since an Anti-Kidnapping Society exists in Shanghai?"

"It even provides me with a livelihood, though a less peaceful one than playing the bar-keeper, like so many other men," added the gentleman-detective.

"Do you search out Shanghai nabobs who are held to ransom and restore them to their families?"

"I usually act as a body-guard, to forestall kidnapping. Sometimes it's dangerous work. To give you a good example, last winter I was engaged to look after a Chinese financier. With my colleague, Vladimir R., a nobleman and a charming fellow of twenty-five, I was waiting for him beside his car, about midnight, on the pavement of Foochow Road, outside the gambling-hell where our Asiatic was playing baccarat. . . ."

"I took you there," Natacha remarked to me.

"All at once, a row on the staircase. The 'boys' shrieked and bolted. We dashed inside. A body of gangsters had seized the millionaire at his cards, and they were bundling him down the staircase, gagged and fainting. We all opened fire. I was wounded, and Vladimir was killed. Two of the brigands were downed, too. But the Chinaman was carried off, in his own car, and his ransom cost him a few sackfuls of taels."

"Poor Vladimir!" exclaimed Katia. "He used to sing *Ochi Tchorneie, Black Eyes*, so nicely!"

"When a Russian girl hears *Ochi Tchorneie* sung," said Tania, rather romantically, "she feels like falling in love on the spot."

"For the love of Holy Russia and in memory of Vladimir," I begged, "please sing us that lovely air."

Tania was on the point of doing so, for she possess a fine false tenor's contralto. But, just as this moment, Sofia the Silent jumped up from her chair.

"Isn't that Achille talking to the cook?"

Achille was Monsieur R——.

My angelic fellow-countryman of the "Venus Bar" made his appearance, without his glasses, and carrying two handbags.

"Well, here I am. . . . And here I stop."

CHAPTER XXVII

I ESCORT ACHILLE IN SEARCH OF A LAWYER

WHAT a thrill he gave those Russians! Sofia herself remained on her feet, very pale, as though she were turned to stone. Only her anxious eyes, in her broad, Siberian Sphinx's face, seemed to say that no good fortune—or bad fortune—could ever deliver her from her native, incurable sadness.

“Achille, what have you done with Mme R——?” demanded the virile Tania.

“My wife? I’ve left her for ever,” declared Monsieur R——; and he wiped his forehead with my napkin.

I handed him a glass full of champagne, and he drank it down like a man. Then, regular sheep gone mad that he was, he told us all about his exploit.

My visit, the night before, had indeed galvanised him into life. Towards dawn, lying sleepless beside the horrible Jewess, he suddenly made up his mind to flee from his conjugal jailer.

One of the gravest difficulties in the way of his escape was that the despot left him no ready money. Still, by virtue of the work he did there, and the mere lending of his name and his moral complicity, Monsieur R—— felt that he was entitled to a share in the profits of the rabbit-hutch in Fearon Road. Whether this establishment was, or was not, philanthropic, he did not stop to ask himself.

As chance would have it, the god of love favoured him. This evening, with her wits wandering for once in her life, Mme R—— forgot to shut her safe. Then she went out—perhaps to visit the synagogue! Her rebel husband explored the safe. In it he found fourteen thousand dollars, in good notes of the Bank of China. He took seven thousand of them, when he might well have taken the lot. . . .

Then he hastily got his clothes together, bought the conscience of the “boy” who was his usual guardian for a hundred dollars, summoned a taxi, and had himself driven, in the first place, to a fictitious address in the International Concession. Thence he had come on to Natacha’s.

“Your wife knows that Sofia is living with me,” said Natacha. “She saw me talking to you last night. She’s bound to think that we’re acting in agreement. And she’ll come along here to tell you what she thinks of you.”

“Can’t be helped. We’ll see. I’ll be ready for her,” replied the heroic man, pouring himself out another glass of champagne.

Then, all at once, Sofia burst into tears. She threw her arms round her lover’s neck. Was it passion, or was it nerves? After all, this greying man might well charm by his sincerity, by his gentleness. He was a Frenchman. . . .

The trick which he had played on the daughter of Israel delighted the Siberian women and the Russian. They started declaiming against the Asiatic Jewesses. According to them, from Harbin to Shanghai it was these women who, as money-lenders or procuresses, most cruelly exploited the carelessness, the capriciousness, and the beauty of the Siberian refugees.

We had been gossiping like this for less than an hour since the arrival of the fugitive when the bell of the flat rang frantically. Then the hall was filled with din.

“It’s the monster!” exclaimed Natacha. “Quick, Sofia, into your room! And you, Achille—into the cupboard with you!”

They obeyed. Immediately afterwards the door of the dining-room burst open, as though it were driven in by a cyclone. The old Chinese cook tumbled backwards into the middle of us vainly repeating: “Not at home, nobody, missus, nobody. . . .” And I

had the privilege of seeing, in all her amplitude, the matron who had been more than half hidden from me by the bar the night before.

"If she leans up against the wall," murmured my neighbour the detective, "the house will collapse."

I had seen her enthroned placidly. To-day she was a fury. Her exasperation and her French vocabulary intermingled in a twofold cry: I wish I could transcribe it less indecently, and above all with its accent.

"Where's that swine?" howled the lady. "Where's that whore?"

Natacha boldly denied that the culprits were under her roof. But Sofia had heard the insult, and she showed herself, glowering darkly.

The anti-kidnapping body-guard had just time to leap in between the rivals. But for him there would have been scratched cheeks. From one and the other of them started a stream of invective in Russian: a language no less colourful than Homer's Greek.

"Well, what do you want?" Natacha interposed in French—out of politeness to me, I suppose.

"He's stolen seven thousand dollars from me! I'll have the thief arrested!" yelled the Jewess.

Doubtless she reckoned that this would bring honest Monsieur R—— out of his hiding-place. Pale and indignant, he emerged from the cupboard.

"You call me a thief, after all the trouble I've taken! . . ."

She rushed at him.

"You rascal, give me back my money! And home with you—and quick about it!"

Sofia tugged at him on the other side. It was epic. Then Monsieur R—— broke his spare spectacles. But he found the crushing retort which met the case.

"Madame, you can go back to Fearon Road by yourself. You'll never see me again, or your dollars either. And we'll have a divorce, by mutual agreement. Otherwise, I'll denounce you to your old creditors in Indo-China, who have lost track of you since your fraudulent bankruptcy in Saigon. And I'll accuse you to every police force in Shanghai of traffic in girls under age and drugs, running clandestine gambling-hells, and . . . and there's more besides, you know. Yes, I'll denounce you all right. I'll broadcast all your secrets. If they put me into prison as your accomplice, it can't be helped. . . ."

"And we shall all support his accusation," Tania contributed.

A sudden silence. The Jewess foamed at the mouth. She felt herself strangled by this threat. Heavily, she took a step backwards.

"We'll meet again," she said to the Russians in Russian.

Then, in her fearful French, she went on to poor Achilles:

"Curse upon you, you swine! You'll be sorry for this. You'll come crawling to me on your knees; and I'll spit on you! I'll give you till to-morrow to beg my pardon."

"Never!" cried Monsieur R——. "Good-bye for ever!"

And she beat a retreat, vanquished. We should never have dared to believe it.

We breathed again. Sofia embraced Monsieur R—— passionately. He groped for his glasses, which had been pulverised in the tussle. Then he took a solemn vow.

"Even if I have to starve, I'll never go back to be her gigolo! Sofia, to-morrow we'll go and get married."

"What?" said I. "Haven't you got to get divorced first?"

"It's not necessary. We shall get married by the parson of a church I know. It costs forty dollars; but they don't ask for any information."

"So you can be a bigamist in Shanghai?"

"A polygamist, if you like. This church doesn't pay attention to anything but love. It despises contracts based on interest."

"But surely this mystical marriage has no value legally?"

"It will have, once I've got a divorce. I'll get it registered at the Consulate. Meanwhile, it will be a personal pleasure."

"You ought to start divorce proceedings at once," Natacha insisted.

"I'll consult the lawyer this very night," Monsieur R—— vowed.

"He won't be in his office, at this time," said Katia. "But you'll find him at the headquarters of the Parisians. . . ."

"Or at that of the Marseillais. . . ."

"Yes, at the 'Prado,' or at the 'Caveau Montmartre.' . . ."

"Excuse me," I asked, "but are you talking about night-haunts?"

"More or less!"

"The Parisians, the Marseillais . . . you mean? . . ."

"The men in the business, the lords of the traffic," Achilles the soft-hearted confirmed.

"And what's the name of this lawyer of yours?"

"For us, there's only one who's sound, honest, and understanding: Marcel B."

"Evoe!" I cried. "I know him. I've baptised him: 'the redresser of wrongs.' "

"Monsieur," said Monsieur R——, "he is worthy of that nickname."

"Come on then, let's go and look for him!" said Sofia. "I'm stifling here. . . ."

We went out in a body. We chartered a big car. Those seven thousand dollars were good ones.

It was a fairly long cruise we went for in that dazzling Shanghai by night which I was beginning to get to know. We accompanied Tania, Katia, Natacha, and the detective to their respective rendezvous. Everywhere we went we drank to friendship, and to the wedding of Sofia and Achille.

People were surprised to see these two publicly together.

"But what about your 'governor,' Monsieur R——, your old Rebecca?"

"Down and out!" replied the intoxicated Monsieur R——. "Eliminated from my Five Years' Plan!"

At the "Monico" we were all embraced and pawed over by a very pretty Russian blonde, rather plump and pitted, but elegant, scented, eminently desirable.

"That's Schirra. Do you like her?" Katia asked me insidiously.

"I should say so! . . ."

They all laughed at my simple-mindedness.

"Schirra is a man. His name is Gerald. . . . He does take you in, doesn't he? He's getting a bit fat now, too. If you had seen him, when he first arrived from Harbin. . . ."

"From Harbin—he too?"

"And not a single 'taxi-girl' had anything like his success, when he was dancing at the 'Sun-Sun' and elsewhere. . . ."

"Really?" said I. "Even with the Chinese?"

"The Chinese are very fond of men disguised as women. . . ."

"Decidedly," I growled, "the White race is losing other things beside 'face' in the eyes of these Yellows."

"Oh, don't be too hard on Schirra! He's so kind-hearted. Gerald has always given all he could to Siberians in distress. Now that he's given up dancing, he's turned dressmaker. It's he who makes our frocks for us. He has such good feminine taste! And we pay him when we can. You must go to see his shop—he's got regular drawing-rooms."

At the “Prado,” G.H.Q. of the Shanghai Marseillais, Achille “put me in right” on the spot with a whole swarm of fellows in the profession. Some of them were hirsute, and some of them were sleek; but all of them were as male and normal as Schirra was female.

“Our recruiting kings—here they are. They’re just the men you wanted to see, aren’t they?”

“A fine lot. . . .”

“Sponsored by me, you’re their brother.”

“I’m very much honoured. . . .”

I circulated among the groups. They came and went quietly around me, these outlaws—all of them the genuine article. Just from their ways you could place them as adventurers. You could not possibly confuse them with respectable citizens. There was something unmistakable graven upon them, something emanating from their faces as much as from their ways.

And, at the same time there was a kind of nobility about them. I mean it. I’m not just trying to be paradoxical. In the first place, they looked you straight in the eyes. They were fine men, all energy—even those who were ugly, those who were blotched, those who were fat. Whether they were big-built or cat-like, thick-set or wiry, the sun of the Tropics, the monsoon, and the trade wind had tanned them, smoked them, passed them through fire. They had nothing any longer in common with the pallid scoundrels of our European capitals. Their job had magnified the spirit of evil in them. To be sure, they led astray; but they ran their risks, too.

In war-time, rogues of this species make soldiers who flinch from nothing. One of them saved my life in 1915, at the great risk of his own, and amid a rout of our comrades who were reputed more honourable. . . . In Asia there is always a certain amount of fighting going on. If they were not brave men, the irregulars of the Road to Shanghai would instead, elsewhere, be hypocritically respectable people!

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITH THE "REDRESSER OF WRONGS," AMID THE "MEN" OF SHANGHAI

MONSIEUR R—— had spoken the truth. He himself, the angelic solicitor, husband of the proprietress of the "Venus Bar," was regarded by these outlaws as an inoffensive cousin of theirs. Introduced by him, I was taken into the family too. In short, I no longer felt a stranger, in this Shanghai fish-pond.

Almost all the voices here were French. But how many different slangs variegated their conversation! I need not speak of Marseillais expressions: there were too many of them. The same applies to the specialised language of the traffic: "You haven't still got your sergeant-major? . . . It was when I was running three families. . . ." Over and above this was added "pidgin." "Chop-chop!" they shouted at the "boys," when they wanted to hurry them up with drinks. And then: "Bring along the *chit*!" when they wanted to sign the voucher, payable at the end of the month—which proves that, in lucky China, the great god Credit is not quite dead yet.

Speaking of a coward, they said: "He's a bitch. . . ."

When, on the other hand, the fellow in question put up a fight, they said: "He's got potential. . . . He's got go. . . . Didn't he give us a warming! . . ."

I overheard gamblers counting in Spanish: "*Cinco. . . . Seis. . . . Capo. . . . Bellote, doblado. . . .*"

Others were speaking English—after a fashion: "What ting have got to-day?"

Achille introduced me so far as he could: "Marius. . . . Jojo. . . . Titin. . . ."

The women stayed where they sat, as good as gold, without saying a word. I could see that here Man made himself respected.

"Hullo!" murmured Monsieur R——, all of a sudden. "Would you like to meet the most famous of the flower-merchants, the pasha of pashas, the king of cultivators?"

"Would I? . . ."

A tanned athlete came up to us: a condescending, even a jovial prince.

"Honorat, known as Nono the Great," Achille introduced him ceremoniously.

He was great, indeed: well over six feet. But he sat him down, and he said politely:

"They call me Nono the Tattooed, too. This is why. . . ."

He put up his chin, and stretched his neck out of his collar, which was a low one, in any case. Then I could see the higher festoons of a fine piece of embroidery-work. It was as though the lace ruff of one of Henry III's courtiers had printed its design on his skin.

"Just lately," Nono told me, "a dentist in the avenue Dubail had me sitting in his arm-chair while he was working on me. He saw this little bit of my ornamentation. After torturing me enough for one day, he asked me to strip. And—I swear to you—he begged me to sell him my skin. . . ."

"What, on the spot?"

"Oh, no—in advance. He wanted to take an option of it, whenever it becomes available."

"Not a bad stroke of business."

"But it struck me that everything becomes known. . . . And I've only too many good friends hereabouts. Just to oblige the dentist, they might be capable of giving him early delivery. . . ."

"Nono," Monsieur R—— explained, "is tattooed all over. On his chest it's women's portraits. On his back it's an African landscape, because he served in the disciplinary battalions. . . ."

Honorat showed me his right hand. Its forefinger was missing.

"I was young," he said, "and I blew my finger off with a flint."

"But the finest thing of all," my godfather went on, "is round his waist and on his stomach. A snake, monsieur, an enormous snake, all in coils. . . ."

Nono burst out laughing heartily.

"You old gradgrind, you needn't tell monsieur where my snake loses his head. . . ."

Then he slapped the shrinking scrivener on the back.

"And what about that old hide of yours? Is it true that your Yidd is going to let go of it?"

Sofia broke into the conversation. (She wasn't so well trained as the other girls.) She explained that they were going to get married. Nono smiled, rather contemptuously. Then his kind heart got the better of him. He stood a round of drinks.

"You're quite right, Achille. For a man like you, there's nothing to be done but lead a regular life and follow the dictates of your heart. You want to change the record, eh? You've made a good job of it. You've got away with seven thousand francs, you say? Take my advice and put them into gambling machines."

"Not a bad idea," Achille agreed.

"Those gadgets in bars, you know," Nono the Tattooed said to me, "where you play for the drinks. The customer is supposed to have a chance of winning. As a matter of fact, he's bound to lose. For the proprietor it means assured, automatic takings—even takings that you can regulate. . . ."

"The admiral has three machines in the 'Caveau Montmartre,' " said my good friend Monsieur R——, by way of quoting an example. "There's no doubt they pay for their hire: one hundred and fifty taels a month. . . ."

"And you can farm them out. I've had as many as seventeen running. Every fortnight, at the share-out, it meant twelve hundred dollars in my pocket. No matter what the gamble is, the Chinese always go mad about it."

The lucid reasoning of this prince of adventurers struck me, a mere listener-in, as unanswerable.

"But, before all else, I must get my divorce," sighed our Achille, harking back to his gnawing obsession.

"You want to see a lawyer? You'll have Marcel, of course? There isn't anybody else. . . . If he's not here, he'll be at the 'Caveau.' "

Monsieur R—— and the Siberian girl got up.

"Wait a minute," said Nono. "I want to see him, too—about some charge or other against me of debauching a girl under age. Come along, monsieur. I'll take you all in my bus. Besides, Achille, I'd like to recommend you to the parson of my church. He knows me; he's married me at least three times, so——"

Nono's "bus" was an American eight-cylinder car. It sped along the avenue Joffre, deserted after midnight, towards the west of Shanghai, where the greyhound-racing track and the Auditorium are situated. It is in this direction that the night-birds of the French Concession seek refuge.

Comfortably ensconced in between Sofia and myself, amid the cushions of this luxurious vehicle, Achille revealed the life-story of my new host to me. Later, in the course of conversation, Nono rounded it off.

To begin with, when he reached the age for his military service, Nono had launched himself into life by distinguishing himself as a deserter. In the case of fellows like him, desertion does not mean fear of fighting. On the contrary, it means impatience to get to blows, and horror of the discipline of peace time.

He was caught and condemned to fifteen years' hard labour. Then the war came along, and bygones were bygones. But then peace returned, officially—and with it boredom and straining against the bars of commonplace morality!

Nono might have gone in for murder as a profession. But he adored the fair sex, and he preferred to devote himself to the White Slave traffic. He haunted the faubourg Montmartre in Paris, and later the rue des Récolettes in Marseilles. He served his time in America: Buenos Aires, Rio, Valparaiso, just as our old-time artisans used to serve their time in the French provinces. Then, now a past-master, he attacked Asia.

From 1930 onwards he prospered in Shanghai, with three "families"; in other words, three girls, French girls, whom he had had the stroke of genius to concentrate in one flat. His clientele was, above all, Chinese. Nono opened the door to visitors and, according to his own formula, "did the book-keeping." Then he waited in the hall until the *tête-à-tête* was over. He was quite strict about the length of the conversation.

"After a quarter of an hour," he told himself, "I used to tap on the wall. If the Chinamen stayed more than twenty-five minutes, the girl knew she would get it hot from me."

Perhaps he was trying to impress me.

"In Paris, at the 'Panier Fleuri,' in the boulevard de la Chapelle," I told him, "I used to know a 'slaughter-house girl,' named Fabienne, who never granted more than six minutes to the Kabyles who were her faithful followers."

"There's a conscientious girl for you!" cried Nono. "Just the kind of girl for me. If you could get in touch with her for me, I'd have her out here. . . ."

Then he turned thoughtful.

"I ought always to have had one girl I could trust, to look after my correspondence and keep my accounts. I can read and reckon, I needn't tell you . . . but as for writing! No, a pen and I have never got on together. Ah, I'm just the opposite to you, Mr. Writer!"

But he could certainly get on with the steering-wheel of an eight-cylinder car. Oh, those turns of his!

Poor Honorat, he was doomed to many disappointments. His high-handed methods tired those first three hard-working girls of his. Frenchwomen are incomparable artistes; but they jib, they rebel, very readily. . . .

One fine day—it is a thing to note, for it seems to happen more and more to the White lords of the Road to Shanghai—an *Asiatic* "recruiter," an unscrupulous little Chinese ruffian, tempted Nono's women with the promise of a life of Sultanias in Szechuen. They embarked, *with this Yellow man*, on a Yangtse steamer, or perhaps in an airplane. Nono never saw any of the three of them again.

Where did they go? What became of them, in that mysterious interior of China, furrowed by caravans and armies? I remembered what Michel Scarface had said to me at Hanoi:

"Only the missionaries might know. . . ."

Thus abandoned, Nono got into touch with a Chinese guild, a rich syndicate of Chinese business men. Victim of a Yellow, he sought revenge from the same race. These worthy rice merchants or tea merchants wanted to reinvest their profits; and perhaps the idea of importing a few Parisians tickled their personal curiosity. In short,

they found funds for Nono, and handed over to him forty-two thousand dollars (at six francs to the dollar).

Thanks to this capital, my friend was able to return to France, and there he went in for the “remount” business on a big scale. When he reappeared in Shanghai he brought a fine stable with him: eight or ten first-class fillies.

Within less than a year, Nono had paid off the loan, and “put aside” two hundred thousand francs. Then he had another streak of bad luck. Several of his women fell sick. The police showed themselves unpleasantly inquisitive.

At the moment he had this fresh trouble, the business of the girl under age. She was a recruit whom he had raised in Shanghai—but a White one—a little Breton girl of nineteen, the nurse-governess to the children of an official of the French Concession. Apparently she met Honorat at a cinema. . . . A ride in his long car—and the tattooing of this King of the Traffic held no secrets for the girl from Paimpol.

But he was not taking her out for his own pleasure. He explained this to her, and she proved docile—as most of them do. Without being forced in any way, without even telling the children’s father, she entrusted herself to Nono. He put her, *from the very second day*, into a house in the rue du Roi-Albert—a purely Chinese brothel. There, just like anybody else, she brought him in his hundred dollars a day. . . .

Meanwhile, the official had reported her disappearance. The police hunted for some time in vain. Then Nono was warned that they were on his track. The nature of the charge laid against him prevented him from smoothing matters over, so he staged a splendid argument for his good faith. He married the girl, before the pastor of Unity Church.

“Cost: forty dollars,” I remarked.

“Hullo, you know all about that already? Yes, but in spite of that, I’m afraid they may try to make trouble for me. So I’d rather see the lawyer. . . .”

We arrived at that “Caveau Montmartre,” about which all financiers had told me, all the way from Shanghai. I was as much moved as an initiate admitted into the great temple at Delphi. . . .

It was a basement in this new western district, underneath a barely-finished building, still surrounded by shacks. The staircase down to it and the circular hall, in bare stone, were enlivened by no less nudist charcoal drawings. All this reminded you of Pompeii and its *graffiti*, as much as Montmartre. But beyond, in the dance-hall and in the rustic arbours of the “Caveau,” I encountered forthwith a hand-picked collection of men even more amazing than those at the “Prado” in the rue du Consulat.

Here they were Parisians, and also Corsicans, both keeping to themselves. There were also, apart from these, a few select Russians, and some Basques, *hai-alai* players. They were possibly gigolos, but not bullies. There was even a negro. He, I was told, lived on the subsidies of a very pretty French girl, an ex-musical comedy actress, now a taxi-girl. What a come-down!

I made a spectacular entrance, flanked as I was by the famous Nono and Achille, whom everybody liked. I was just breathing my first mouthfuls of this atmosphere, with its background of perspiring flesh, Oriental tobacco and opium, when a fellow with a frank and really attractive face, wearing the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre in his button-hole, hurried up to me.

“Monsieur Henry? I’ve been expecting you. Margot wrote to me about you from Canton. I’m Lucien—Lucien the Chauffeur. And there’s Lawyer B., who told me that you had arrived in Shanghai.”

A hand waved to me from the midst of a group. A Latin voice, gay and melodious, hailed me.

“Ah, you in person! Come over here, my friend. . . .”

There was my companion on the steamer, right in the middle of a legal consultation. Sofia, saved from sordid adventure by Monsieur R——, threw her arms round charming Koukla, the lawyer’s young Siberian wife; Koukla, another case of salvage. After all, in Shanghai there are not only Frenchmen who prostitute women; there are also a few who rescue them. . . .

I have rarely, in all my travelling, experienced a warmer feeling of cordiality. I’m not blaspheming: it was homelike, *gemütlich*, a family party. It was also very innocent, very pure—and this is what people call the profession of vice!

“Where’s the admiral?” cried Marcel. “He must meet Monsieur Henry at once.”

“The admiral’s still asleep. Let’s wake him up!”

“No, no!” I protested. “I’ve only come here for five minutes. . . .”

“Once he knows you’re here, you’ll see him getting out of bed fast enough. . . . And to know the admiral, is to know all there is to know about Shanghai!”

CHAPTER XXIX

I TRY MY HAND AT TRAINING FAKE PARISIENNES

THE lawyer of outlawry took me aside a little.

“Well, have you been about Shanghai a bit? Have you talked to the officials?”

“I have; and what they let me see evidently wasn’t the *whole* truth. But that’s always the case. . . .”

“They don’t know everything that goes on themselves. They would need to live in contact with the underworld, and in its confidence, as I do. They must be aware that the traffic exists; but, since they can’t suppress it, they just deny its existence. For my part, I’m just as much opposed in principle to this odious traffic as you are, and as these officials are; but I think it’s more effective to get to know the bullies than to execrate them from a distance.”

“It’s one method——”

“Don’t you take me for an unscrupulous lawyer,” he went on, with that spontaneity which I liked so much in him. “My dear fellow, what is the essential role of the advocate? It is to find a measure of justice between human nature and the social order. That’s what I keep on saying to myself, when the artless stories of some of my clients sometimes give me a start.”

“Oh, yes, the blackest of deeds do not always imply blackness of soul.”

“I can assure you, I know very well that my presence has prevented many a crime against women, and *many an act of treachery against France*, in this filibustering Shanghai. I’ll admit, too, that I’d rather pick my cases here than on the Paris Bourse or on Wall Street.”

“Two spots devoted to virtue, to be sure. . . .”

Our moralising was interrupted by a fellow named Maurice. He was a pure Parisian. Ten years in Asia had not managed to get the better of his splendid gawkinsness, his newsboy’s thinness, his turned-up chin and his weasel nose.

It did me good to look at him. For his part, he identified me himself.

“You’re the gentleman who was taken for a pimp by my comrade Louis, one morning last year at the barber’s in the avenue de Clichy,” he said. “Louis wrote to me that you were coming.”

“Then you must be Maurice the Armourer,” said I.

“Yes, that’s my name in business. By the way, Louis must have been off his form, that morning, to take you for one of us. If you’ll excuse my saying so, you’re not our kind at all.”

“I’m sorry,” said I, as I shook hands with him.

We drank brandy and ginger-ale together. Then he jumped down from his stool, regular bundle of nerves that he was, and dashed off into the back room, whence the news of my arrival had made him burst out like the Devil himself. But the look on his face and the way he waved his hand promised me that he would soon be back with a surprise for me.

“Maurice made his start in gun-running—hence his nickname,” Marcel explained to me. “He used to be a steward on board a liner. It occurred to him to fit double-bottoms to the brass flower-pots which adorn the public rooms. A revolver and a hundred cartridges just fitted in nicely. Beforehand, too, the flower-pots used to topple over with the rolling of the ship. That ballasted them. . . .”

"An advantage all round. And the profits were considerable?"

"Purchase-price of a revolver: two hundred francs. Sale price in Asia: five hundred Mexican dollars, or, say, three thousand francs."

"I can understand why a certain number of Europeans in China should have been killed for the sake of their revolvers. . . ."

"So could Maurice. The nickname has stuck to him, you know. It's like a birthmark, and it annoys him more and more. Still, he wasn't long in turning to less criminal speculations. . . . To-day he's the great greyhound smuggler. Those animals come mostly from Australia. The customs duty on them is very high, for they represent fortunes, thanks to the bets which are laid on their running at the Canidrome."

"And women-smuggling?"

"The Armourer doesn't neglect that either. His special objective is Hankow."

"The wealthy city on the Yangtse?"

"The great market for rice, the pleasure resort of Chinese millionaires, and an International Concession with a French garrison, which often serves to justify the dispatch of White prostitutes. . . ."

"But I suppose the Yellows attract them there, too, just as much as our soldiers."

"More so. In proportion to their dollars. At Hankow there are French girls, and there are Russian girls. Maurice is tactful enough not to dispatch his fellow-countrywomen. He deals only in foreign White women. I imagine they're fascinated by his prestige as a Parisian. For that matter—here's a point that will interest you—since they all want to be taken for Parisians themselves by the Chinese, he teaches them how to pretend they are. He drums a few magic words into them. . . ."

"You mean to say that ex-street arab runs a school for fake Parisian women?"

"If you like to put it that way. It's better than if he debauched the real ones, isn't it?"

"No doubt. . . . The only thing is that he's propagating the legend of Parisian vice."

"What can you expect? He's no saint; and he's catering for a demand. . . ."

"It's just like that girl Katia, who was educated by French nuns at Harbin, and takes advantage of the fact to say: 'Oh, yes, I was born in Montmartre.' If I had my way, I'd restrain these Shanghai pseudo-Parisian women of yours."

A thick-set little man, clearly in his fifties, but with his hair dyed the finest black, and with a cheerful, frank, prepossessing face, came up to speak to Marcel. He talked with a Corsican accent.

"Well, Mr. Lawyer, you saved a human life between last night and this morning."

"Come, come, don't exaggerate, my dear fellow!"

"Yes, you did. But for you, the Alsatian would never have found the money; and then there couldn't have been any settlement except a hole in his hide."

Marcel introduced him to me with a laugh.

"Another celebrity: Orchino, or rather 'Golden Mug.' "

I might have baptised him so myself, from the moment I set eyes on him. He was so jovial that he showed all his teeth; and all of them, the top row as well as the bottom, had been remade out of the "fabulous metal." It was a double jawful of gold that he had in that smiling mouth of his.

"I ate too much sugar in my youth," he declared with a wink.

"You ate too many apples," retorted Marcel.

" 'Golden Mug,' now before you, was one of the potentates of the South American traffic. Argentina, Brazil, the Canaries—he ran the whole round, for a quarter of a century. Then he came to Shanghai, with only two 'families.' "

"And I *married* one of them," added Orchino, benevolent and paternal. "For the other girl, a good worker too, I bought a restaurant on the quai de France. I lived on the floor above it with my wedded wife. We have our food sent up to us. It's very convenient. You must come to lunch. I'll give you some of my fish dishes from Japan; for nowadays I'm the chief importer in the Hongkew market. I supply the hotels and the Consulates—crabs, lobsters, all kinds of shell-fish."

He leant nearer our ears and whispered comically:

"You see, I couldn't give up fishing in troubled waters altogether. . . ."

He took his leave of us, after shaking hands with me warmly. On his own hand a four-carat diamond sparkled.

"Charming, that fisherman," said I. "But what new piece of rescue work was he congratulating you over? Tell me all about it."

"It's an example of one of the extra-judicial situations in which these odd clients of mine take me for arbiter. You met Michel Scarface in Tonkin, didn't you, and you know the story of his scar?"

"He borrowed a sultana from another Pasha. . . ."

"Quite so. It costs you dear in the profession. Well, the Alsatian, one of my clients, was guilty of the same misdeed here, with an Italian woman. She belongs to a man from Nice who keeps 'daughters of joy' in Tientsin, and who was away at the moment on a pastoral visitation to them. The man from Nice heard about it as soon as he got back. It meant a stab or a bullet in the back for the Alsatian, without a fighting chance."

"I can imagine the characters."

"Yesterday evening, at eight o'clock, I was just finishing dinner with Koukla. Golden Mug telephoned me: 'Can we see you at once? There's Fritz, Nono, the Admiral, Lucien, Carlo and myself.' I told them to come along, and things got hot. Fritz pretended he didn't know the woman belonged to the man. Carlo proved that his prior claim must be known to everybody in Shanghai, in certain circles. . . . To cut the story short, I put a little common sense into them. I extorted them to patch it up, on payment of an indemnity. We agreed on the sum of two thousand dollars. . . ."

"Mexican dollars—otherwise twelve thousand francs?"

"No, American dollars, *gold* dollars. . . . Fifty thousand francs."

"*Caramba!* Nice was making Italy pay."

"The sum had to be paid cash down. Fritz hadn't got it. But he's Lucien's 'blood-brother.'"

"'You've got my blood, and my money's yours,' said Lucien. 'But you know most of my money is tied up in Margot's house in Canton. I can give you a cheque for twenty-five thousand francs. It will clean out my bank balance.'"

"Carlo said: 'All right. But, in that case, the balance must be paid to-morrow morning at the latest, by eleven o'clock, at the Chakalian Bar.' "

"A pretty name!"

"The Bar belongs to a French-Armenian. . . . This morning we all drank the glass of peace at his counter. The man from Nice had the other thousand gold dollars in his pocket. He had stipulated, moreover, that the Alsatian should leave any café in which he met him, Carlo. And I said to Fritz:

"'Agree to that, and no bravado. It's you who are in the wrong.' "

"You judge like a *cadi* of Baghdad, Marcel. But where did you get these other thousand gold dollars, which weren't available the night before?"

"We knew where to find them on the spot. They *belonged* to Fritz; but Fritz hadn't got them. He has a regular woman of his own, by the name of Paulette; and it's she who takes care of his money."

"I see. . . . So where the cleverness came in was explaining away to Paulette her little man's infidelity with that cursed Italian woman, and getting her to pay the indemnity. . . ."

"I didn't try to be clever. I simply told her the facts. She cried, but she forgave him."

"So it was you, you apostolic advocate, who undertook this most delicate pleading of all as well?"

"The others begged me to undertake it. 'You don't belong to the profession,' they said. 'Paulette respects you. But she would tear our eyes out, and then Carlo would execute Fritz. Do this for us, and you'll be saving a life.' "

"Hence Golden Mug's enthusiasm for you."

"Funny fellows, aren't they?" Marcel wound up thoughtfully. "There's something of the child, something of the innocent savage, something of the hero about them, as much as something of the sinner, I can assure you. . . . And these women, jealous though they are, remain capable of passionate love, despite their business. . . . Hello, here's Maurice the Armourer bringing his latest pupil to show you."

The Parisian florist in Asia was, indeed, bringing me the "surprise" he had promised me. To show how well he had her in hand, he held her at arm's length, by the back of her neck, and shook her gently with his restless hand: all of which made the girl bow and show off her paces.

She was a pretty little Siberian Manon—clearly under age—newly arrived, if not in a stage-coach, at least in a Chinese motor-coach. Her cheeks were rosy apples, and her eyes were carbuncles. No senator, no past, present, or future minister could fail to embrace her at sight.

"You'll see, monsieur, how I advertise the Mother Country," the obliging fellow said to me. He was exultant, sincere, all unconscious—the true patriot!

Then he ordered the poor innocent, in Russian:

"Say your lesson. . . . Do just as I've told you. . . ."

She swayed her slim body in a kind of stomach-dance. She rolled her eyes and tried to copy her plebeian professor's grin. And her voice, at the same time cooing and hoarse, Slav and Mongol, articulated comically:

"Moulin-Rouge. . . . Quartier Latin. . . . Boul' Mich'"

"No, no, it's terrible, it's grotesque!" I cried, despite myself.

"It's good enough for the Chinese," grumbled Maurice.

Then he corrected himself. He was both modest and flattering.

"You're quite right, monsieur. . . . I've lived so long away from France that I don't remember very well. . . . besides, they're suspicious, these up-to-date Yellows, the students who know Paris. . . . Now listen to monsieur, little frog. He's going to teach you better. . . ."

The simple-minded little actress was so gracious, so attentive, her smile was so irresistible, that I quite forgot the scandal, the sacrilege, of the play-acting we were teaching her. Though, why should she need to call herself a Parisian in order to attract? In Paris itself, her silence would have sufficed. . . .

I spelt out: "Mou-lin-Rou-ge. . . ." and she repeated it nicely. Around us the company gaped at the spectacle. Mischievous Koukla laughed till she cried, on the shoulder of serious, enigmatic Sofia.

“That’ll do,” I said. “Anyway, that’s more like it.”

“I’ll have to do better,” Maurice conceded. “Thank you monsieur. Off with you now, Liouba!”

I was depressed, and I felt very much like losing my temper.

“Ah, you’d make a fine master for this school of ours, if only you’d stay in Shanghai!” the Armourer said to me. He said it so simply, with such conviction, that my uneasiness evaporated again.

Marcel, who was doubtless in a hurry to witness the end of this episode, sprang to his feet.

“Paoletti is awake. There he is. All hail, Admiral! This way, Your Excellency!”

And he added to me:

“Do you want to know how far we White races can acclimatise ourselves in China? Just look at that face!”

CHAPTER XXX

I AM APPOINTED CHINESE GENERAL BY A CORSICAN ADMIRAL

DOWN a winding staircase, at the back of the cabaret, a personage was descending towards us who was, indeed, unique. He reached the lowest step, observed everything and everybody with the flashing glance of an emperor, and came over to our table.

His walk was at once military and limp. He had the sway of an ex-sailor who never loses his roll, and also that of a master-drinker who keeps his eye on his equilibrium even when he is sober.

"Hullo, Admiral, had a good sleep?" the men asked him.

"How are you, *Papischka*, Little Father?" cried the Siberian girls, moved by an unmistakable affection for this man in his sixties, poor though he was.

Marcel, Lucien, and Monsieur R——, introduced me all together. Paoletti sat down opposite me and smiled—or at least as much as he ever could. For I have rarely seen a more immobile face. Hence, I thought, part of his quasi-fascinating effect on women.

"You've lived in China a long time, haven't you?" I asked him.

"Ever since my active service with the Colonial troops," he replied, with all the courtesy of a *condottiere*.

Never had the phenomenon of mimicry, the adaptation of a living being to its environment, struck me as more strongly marked. Paoletti must have been born a pure product of Corsica. And I know very well that Corsica is not quite Europe: it is something more than Europe! But, after forty years of Asia, of working and fighting and taking his pleasure, one whole Chinese layer, and another whole Russian layer, had covered up his native substance.

He had become Corsican-Chino-Slav. His complexion was that of yellow earth. Beneath his straight hair, of the same black as Golden Mug's, his old outlaw's eyes were wrinkled.

Really, he reminded you of Ivan the Terrible or Ghenghis Khan, much more than of an old sergeant-major from Ajaccio. But, in his bulging shirt-front and his loose dinner-jacket, he preserved something of the army: the way he held his head high, his special kind of distinction. Perhaps, in default of a breast-plate, he was wearing a chain-mail vest. For there had long been a price on his head.

Once he presented himself, he relegated all the other paladins of Shanghai outlawry into the background: even Nono, King of the Traffic. He dominated all of them by the nobility that remained imprinted upon him, even in his decadence. I felt that he had been the least self-seeking and the most daring, the most familiar with good luck, mischance and intoxication, out of all this last company of White conquistadors, who set forth in the twentieth century to raid an Asia which will soon overwhelm its adventurers.

I was burning with anxiety to hear the Admiral's story. But he was not the kind of man to give himself away so soon. For that night we stayed on a footing of nothing more than cordiality.

Lawyer Marcel B. finished his consultations. He promised Monsieur R—— and Sofia that he would defend them against the Jewess of the "Venus Bar." He recommended Nono to leave Shanghai for a time, until the scandal of the Breton girl under age whom he had carried off and prostituted blew over.

Paoletti listened in silence and nodded approvingly. Then some important guests arrived: an American, who was backing Chinese cinema studios, and some Russian Jews in high finance. He went to meet them. He invited the ladies to dance; and it was a marvel to see him guiding them, holding himself proudly, with his arms in the right position and his legs picking up the steps, just as they used to do at the old-time Bal Bullier in Paris.

"How did the Admiral come to run this night-haunt?" said Marcel, whom I was plying with questions. "His life-story would fill a book. I may write it myself, if the abolition of the Mixed Tribunal leaves me out of a job! In that case, I shall make use of my notes as a lawyer and a journalist in Asia. Paoletti will be one of the most extraordinary characters among those I can reveal to the public."

"I'll boost your book for you. But tell me just enough to whet the readers' curiosity!"

Well, it was like this. At that time, the immensity of China was, even more than it is to-day, the happy hunting-ground of the strong man. You could create, you could destroy, you could make war. There were *Chuchuns* whose mercenaries took one another's measure; and there were also Europeans who built railways and then managed them, with the capital of really optimistic shareholders.

The main users of the railways were naturally the *Chuchuns*. They took advantage of the railways to transport soldiers, guns, all their gear. But, as they rarely paid their fares, the railway companies bestirred themselves to avoid requisitions from my lords the Marshals, though they did not flatly refuse them for fear of reprisals. The coaches were engaged elsewhere; the engines just happened to be under repair. . . .

Now the great Marshal U-Pei-Fu, the warrior lord who was then the most feared in Central China, was preparing for a campaign against the Marshal of the North, Chang-Tso-Lin. He would come down from Mukden. U-Pei-Fu proposed to attack him on his way to Peking, in the province of Jehol, which has since seen further fighting.

The railway from Hankow to Peking was an essential line of communication for the lord in question. Hankow, that city on the Yangtse where they like Frenchwomen. . . . The railway company was French, too. It is not only women that France sends to the other end of the world: she sends money and muscle as well. The superintendents on the railway were French. One of them was named Paoletti.

After serving in garrison in various French Concessions in China, Paoletti had obtained his discharge from the Marines with the rank of sergeant. Unlike most of his comrades, he did not return to France, there to become a prosaic exciseman or Métro clerk. He applied for employment on the Hankow-Peking railway. You wore uniform. You could sport your stripes. And this was Asia.

Paoletti understood Asia. In his district, U-Pei-Fu could always count on trucks, engines, and coal. And then one evening, shortly before the beginning of the campaign, the Marshal invited his friend the superintendent to a ceremonial dinner.

All the military mandarins were there, with stripes, for their part, right up to their shoulders. Paoletti felt depressed.

"Why aren't I a Chinaman?" the good fellow said to himself. "Then I might do some fighting, too. . . ."

All at once his host, U-Pei-Fu, presented him with a gay challenge to drink: "*Kam-pe!*" Everybody emptied his glass. Then the Marshal asked:

"My French friend, would you like to enter my service? Would you like to become my confidential adviser, my second-in-command, my Chief of Staff?"

Paoletti, to be sure, thought he was dreaming. But he was a Corsican. Napoleon had been one, too. So he accepted.

During the past few years he had had the wit to study Chinese dialects—doubtless as much with Sing-Song girls as with men of letters. This helped him enormously in his new way of life. He accompanied U-Pei-Fu to Peking, and there he installed himself in a *yamen* worthy of his rank. He had been a private in the Marines; so in the Chinese army he became an admiral.

He was answerable for the army treasury: he drafted plans, he appointed officers, he promulgated orders. The Marshal had no secrets from him. The confidence which the Marshal placed in him meant pay which, at his most prosperous period, rose to fifty thousand Mexican dollars—three hundred thousand French francs—a *month*. Soldiering in Asia was a fine business. . . .

Paoletti the sybarite tasted all the choicest pleasures of modern China. No other Frenchman ever experienced them as he did.

For that matter, far from proving a renegade to his Fatherland, he went out of his way to direct the flow of dollars towards her. Thanks to him, more than fifty millions were lost to English and German industry, and were spent on French supplies: khaki cloth and machine-guns.

But alas, even in China, wars come to a bad end. Chang-Tso-Lin launched his attack. U-Pei-Fu counter-attacked. Some spicy pages by Albert Londres have depicted for us the confusion in Peking, and the typically Chinese disorder at the front, during the struggle between the two Marshals.

Admiral-Chief of Staff Paoletti behaved very gallantly. But the worst of breakdowns for an ex-railwayman, and the worst of misfortunes for a general, happened to him: his armoured train was derailed and captured by the enemy.

Chang-Tso-Lin condemned him to death, but postponed his execution. Then he gained experience of another China: the China of punishment. The prisoner went through as many anxieties as he did dungeons.

Sometimes they promised his life in return for tactical information. Sometimes he was subjected to frightful marches in the rain, barefoot, between two Chinese horsemen. Finally, he was handed over to the executioner. But the executioner was a Chinaman, too. While he was sharpening his sword, he negotiated the price of a fictitious decapitation with the condemned White. Paoletti made his escape, very much alive, while his pseudo-corpse was being buried.

But it was too late. By this time U-Pei-Fu, deprived of his French adviser, had lost the decisive battle. The Admiral overtook his army in utter rout. All he could do was save some of the archives. The Marshal himself fled into the depths of Szechuen. Paoletti was the worst loser. The railway company had struck him off the list of its superintendents. He was an outlaw, with a price put on his head by the victorious Chang-Tso-Lin.

So, like all shipwrecked men in Asia, he was stranded in Shanghai. There he had to play many parts before he resigned himself—he who had been all but Caesar—to the humble empire of the “Caveau Montmartre.”

For my part, I went back to the “Caveau” several nights in succession. Nowhere else could I find so many, and such lively, subjects of my study: the traffickers in women and the Yellow fanciers of White women, French and Siberian.

Bit by bit, I won the Admiral over.

Finally a night came when, after warming glorious memories to life again at the bar, he took me affectionately by the arm.

"I'm going to make you a present which only two friends of mine have ever received from me before. In the first place, come up to my room. . . ."

I thanked him, at a venture, wringing him by the hand. Then we climbed the winding stairs.

Paoletti's room, up above the dance-hall—what a poem!

In inextricable disorder, trophies, military and amorous, fraternised there. There was a flag wrapped round its staff. Old lace scarves, faded garters, hung from the same hook as a shoulder-belt.

Then there were boxes of favours, scent-bottles, and a whole arsenal of spirit-bottles. The camp bed was tidily made. There you could tell the ex-sergeant. On the other hand, a scent of Woman hung about it. Even still, lady visitors must come up here; and Russian ones, whose worst Bohemia is never wholly vile. Such as Papischka's lair!

The Admiral pulled out a black trunk from underneath his bed. With some difficulty he hoisted it on to a strewn table. Then he opened it.

The odour of camphor, opium, and a whole mysterious past enveloped us. Within the trunk lay uniforms neatly folded, and embroidered Chinese robes. Then there were big files, seals, stamp-dies: the famous archives, the diplomatic and hierarchical instruments of the army of U-Pei-Fu.

"The great Marshal was beaten. He has no army left now," the old Corsican hero said to me, in his hoarse voice. "But U-Pei-Fu is still alive. And he has never deprived me of my authority. . . ."

He unfurled what had once been an enormous roll of detachable documents, to whose stub were still attached a few sheets, printed in red and blue Chinese characters, with the portrait of Sun-Yat-Sen, framed in Nationalist standards.

"These are the commissions of our generals which I was entrusted with issuing," Paoletti added.

His eagle eyes gazed at me, transfixed me, in between their wrinkled, shrivelled lids. I could tell that he was conscientiously making sure that I really deserved an honour which, in his eyes, was a real one, a mark of high favour. He decided that I did, inked his two rectangular seals on the half-dry pad, stamped one of the commissions with them and tore it off.

"This is yours now," he said.

"You're appointing me one of U-Pei-Fu's generals?"

"I have the right to do so."

"What promotion for an ex-corporal of Vauquois! . . ."

"Listen to me," said Paoletti, very seriously. "The Marshal is still alive. If the Japanese chase Chang-Tso-Lin's son, Chang-Su-Liang, out of Peking; and if the Republican South and Centre refuse to let the Emperor Pu-Yi be restored and place their faith once more in the champion of Szechuen . . ."

"Yes?"

"Then U-Pei-Fu will reassemble a liberating army. And I shall become his Chief of Staff again. And our generals will have troops to command. . . ."

"Admiral, if I ever hear such news as that even if I am at the other end of the world, I shall charter the fastest of airplanes and hasten to take over my Chinese regiments. . . ."

"It may happen," he repeated, nodding his head. "Who is the man of to-morrow in China? The man of yesterday. . . ."

"And in Europe, too. . . ."

Paoletti raised his forefinger and shattered my enthusiasm.

“You are going on to Nankin, Pekin, and Mukden?”

“That is my itinerary, after Shanghai.”

“Suppose Chang-Su-Liang or the Japanese find you in possession of this commission—or any other of the Marshal’s enemies. . . .”

“So he still has enemies, poor U-Pei-Fu, my venerated overlord?”

“He has as many enemies as a beaten man can have.”

“The deuce he has! . . . Well, what would they do to me?”

“You would be treated like myself, or any other higher office of the scattered army.”

“And that means?”

“The Japanese would simply shoot you. But the Chinese would torture you first. . . .”

I put my commission into my pocket.

“Well, Admiral, I’ll take the risk. I don’t suppose I’ll ever have another chance of being appointed a general. . . . And it’s a fine thing to be a general!”

But, all the same, I did my best to hide that precious, diabolical sheet of paper in between my shirts in a suitcase, like a box of cigars, when I finally left Shanghai on board Yangtse steamer.

PART IV

The “Northern Round”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE "GREAT PLOT"

SHE was not so lively as the Canton one, that Yangtse steamer. She, too, was barred and armour-plated. But, this time, no White woman was a passenger, though I was told that, often enough, such passengers were to be seen on board.

In the muddy waters of the great river, no severed heads were floating adrift. Nor, to be sure, could I perceive any Parisian girls' berets or red silk belts: flotsam which, in this staggering new China, would not have surprised me in the least.

I carried away matter for reflection from Shanghai. . . . I thought about all I had seen, in that city which, to-day, enjoys as great a prestige in Asia as Rome possessed in the ancient world.

All that I had seen: *ought I to tell it?* I wondered.

It was one of those everlasting cases of conscience which worry the professional observer, whenever he encounters a great social tragedy, which is necessarily complex. He feels the urgency of making known the truth; he also feels the danger of stirring up scandal.

When I was given facilities on my earlier travels, they told me in high places:

"France's Colonial achievements are very much under-rated. Will you help simply to see justice done to them?"

I gave that undertaking at once, and wholeheartedly. I feel that I should not be living up to it if, as part of the testimony I have to offer, I omitted the present book. I have other testimony to offer, too; but let me stick to this piece. . . .

I am sure that I shall not incur the disapproval of the true Colonials, whom I have seen struggling for greater cleanliness and better order. I believe that, by my frankness, I am making their task easier.

How could I fail to be haunted by the memory of that startling city: *French Shanghai*, almost entirely unknown in France; that city which, now, after all the heroism of its creators, is gradually becoming the property, the prey, of a money-market even more odious than that of Europe?

Above all, it was the more degraded pictures of that Shanghai which haunted me: those pictures that came as a sequel to all the tableaux of the Traffic which had presented themselves to me along what I have called the "Southern Round."

Some squeamish people may say to me:

"You showed a singular curiosity; and sometimes, indeed, a singular sympathy. . . ."

If I had not surveyed this side of things, among others, imperturbably, I should be unable to understand the present-day racial problem in Asia. *Any other study which I might undertake would be falsified by my ignorance of a process of sexual evolution, which is one of the gravest things, one of the most tragic things, amid all the changes of our century.*

The "Road to Shanghai" exists, just like the Road to Buenos Aires. There, in the ports of Asia, in the same way as in the ports of Argentina and Brazil, men, Frenchmen, Russians or Yellow men, sell to other men, White or Coloured—and more and more the latter—White women brought from a distance, in accordance with a traffic-system as regular as the Paris market trains.

I suspected the existence of this business in Paris and Marseilles. I was initiated into it as soon as I reached Singapore. I could have no doubts left about its growing

scope after what I discovered in Hong-Kong and Shanghai—and also along the “Northern Round”: Hankow, Pekin, Tientsin.

I made the acquaintance of professionals who controlled two, three, perhaps five prostituted women. I got them to talk to me. I discovered that, in general, these women were volunteers; and that their exploiters, though undoubtedly freebooters, were no monsters. . . .

Michel Scarface, Nono the Tattooed, Golden Mug, Lucien, Maurice—all these smiling fellows make their living, and grow rich, out of this disconcerting traffic in Asia, just as others do in America. And they themselves said to me:

“It’s not good enough. Our race is ‘losing face’ in the eyes of the Yellows.”

They themselves led me to fear lest the formula of one of our enemies, thorough-going enough to-day, may come only too true to-morrow: “*One Frenchman the less, one Frenchwoman the more.*”

Yes, there are French prostitutes everywhere in the Far East, just as there are beyond the South Atlantic.

To be sure, bad as things are, they are still small in number, they are still the exception, by comparison with the trusty army of true French Colonial women. But there are only too many of them already. And why are they there? Through viciousness, through perversity? Very rarely.

This abuse of woman—even consenting woman—on Asiatic soil, and often under the French flag, is intolerable. But it is not police, governors and consuls who can remedy the situation, any better than they are doing. There is nothing to be done, so long as there is connivance, *against their would-be saviours*, between the prostitutes and the traffickers. Just as it does towards America, so the traffic will continue towards Asia; and it will increase, because these wealthy countries seem more and more to be discovering the beauty of the White woman.

If I had said to the bullies, who told me their stories: “You are criminals,” they would simply have stopped taking me into their confidence. For that matter, that was not what I thought of them. What I did think was:

“They are blind, they are irresponsible. They profit by a situation which they have not created, a very painful but very common situation: namely, the material and the intellectual—above all, the intellectual—poverty of woman in our proud democracies of Europe.”

Give Frenchwomen of the poorer classes enough to live on, and give them an intellectual goal, a sense of direction, in that frightful civilisation of ours in which we let them struggle at random—and the bullies will disappear, for lack of the “bullied.”

What Albert Londres wrote about the “*Franchuchas*” of Buenos Aires, I repeat with no less pity for the “*Madames françaises*” of Shanghai and the whole of China. But, in the case of Shanghai, there are two considerations still more painful. The tragedy is twice as poignant, twice as revolting, for us.

To begin with, there is *calumny*. Apart from the real Frenchwomen, there are the manufactured ones, the faked ones: Belgian, German, Siberian women, trained and camouflaged as pseudo-Montmartre girls, who innocently propagate the legend of French corruption.

After all, is it not unendurable, that dictum, that *leitmotiv*, which I rediscovered everywhere in Asia, just the same as elsewhere all over the world: “The Frenchwoman is the ideal prostitute”?

How, in the face of so strong a prejudice—and in the face of so much ill-will—can we reassert the glaring truth: namely, that of all women the Frenchwoman is, to be sure, the most human, the most individual, and therefore, doubtless, the most

charming; but also, of all women, the least mercenary, the least vicious?

I commend this capitally important question to all French propagandists, public and private. At the same time, I commend all Frenchwomen who are candidates for overseas to the protection—the intelligent, effective protection—of the various lay and religious organisations in my country.

The second aggravation of that brutal fact, *the prostitution of White women in Asia*, is the cheapening of our White race, in the eyes of the Coloured races, through the medium of the most sacred thing it possesses.

Formerly, to all the Coloured, all over the world, the White woman was a miracle, a goddess, a being inaccessible and intangible. She is becoming an object of enjoyment, and sometimes of derision, for those same Coloured races, in Asia and all over the planet.

Yes, this profanation, this fall, is becoming *world-wide*; and it is much more than an episode to enliven the study of political economy.

I realised all this, as I reflected on board my Yangtse steamer.

I recalled any number of earlier impressions, things I had seen with my own eyes, stories I knew to be true, in Africa and Madagascar, in the Near East, and in Europe itself: in Berlin and London—and also in New York—as well as in Paris.

The English trial of that Frenchwoman charged with killing an Egyptian prince, which once inspired me with a subject for a book. Poignant tales about the lives of White women settled in Abyssinia, and among the Congolese, and the Sakalaves. Forebodings of Americans, threatened by the swarming of their Blacks and by Japanese or Chinese invasion. In France herself, the appearance of native suburbs; cross-breeding to be found even in the depths of the provinces; the astonishing vogue of Negro cabarets, copied from Harlem. . . .

Everywhere, in short, racial mixture, racial conflict, perhaps racial war, *on account of the White woman, through the White woman*. It struck me as a fact self-evident—and as an event.

I talked about it to everybody—aboard the Yangtse steamer herself, to my Belgian companion, M. de V.; then, in Nankin, in Peking, to my hosts; to poor Albert Nachbaur, who had not long to live, and to the beautiful Russian woman, Choura, to whom he introduced me in his house at Pi-Yung-Tse. . . . Now you will understand that conversation of mine with Albert Londres, that last evening of ours together at the “Café Mukden.”

Almost all the people I questioned began by falling back on the stereotyped theory.

“Come, come,” they objected, “the Yellows don’t like White women! . . . Still, I know of such-and-such a marriage between a Chinaman and a Siberian girl. . . . Such-and-such an affair. . . . But it’s quite recent, quite a novelty. . . .”

“Exactly,” said I. “After all, there’s always some novelty cropping up under this sun of ours. . . . This one is due to all the travelling in modern life, to rapid, easy transportation, to liners, airplanes—and also to the cinema, with all its glorification of White ‘stars’. . . .”

“Now you mention it . . . Did you hear about that ‘Living Buddha’ of Urga who was found dead in his cell, lying on a sheaf of our most lascivious Paris papers? . . .”

“And doesn’t that Lamaistic jollity strike you as extraordinary?”

Little by little, they told me tales of the “Northern Round.” It was just the same story as in the South. Mongol princes, Tibetan wise men—they, too, were discovering the White woman.

I had got as far as Japan—that Oriental prodigy of a civilisation itself quite new, startling in its need for expansion—when somebody said something which was to complete my keenness about this subject of my study, and henceforth extend it to cover the whole world.

I was crossing the great island of Hondo, the heart of the Japanese archipelago, from Shimonoseki to Kobe, in a splendid express, more comfortable, more up-to-date than the best Pullman cars in the United States. Whenever I looked out of the window, I saw a factory outside, or, if not, a barracks. A terribly over-peopled country.

I went to lunch in the restaurant car. I sat down opposite to a Japanese, in European dress, who spoke French. He was charming in his attentions, as all Japanese can be when they like.

When we came to dessert, we offered each other saki, turn about. Saki is a very sweet but singularly pernicious spirit. I have drunk plenty of others during my travels, so I stood it like a real Japanese.

I had brought with me, from the library-car, one of those fine magazines which are devoted, there as among us, to the cinema. It was printed in characters which I could not read. But coloured portraits of famous film stars illustrated it. These “stars” were all of our race—Garbo, Damita, Marlene: White women. Half-naked, in scenes from their celebrated films, they exhibited themselves to the people of Tokio, just as they do to our European audiences. I took my neighbour to witness.

“So,” I said to him, emboldened by the saki, “in Japan, too, you’re falling in love with White women?”

Despite his extreme politeness, he started violently.

“White women, we Japanese?” he repeated. “Oh, no, we’re not falling in love with them. *Only one woman counts for us: the Japanese woman.*”

He spoke with such sincerity that I felt sure his reply held good, not only for himself, but for all the people of Nippon. Had I, then, found a Yellow country exempt from the evolution of the others? . . . But the saki-drinker was smiling again, swaying slightly in his chair.

“Observe the West,” he went on, in a somewhat superior tone, “study your customs, adapt them, if they can be subordinated to our own—that we do. Japanese women know very well how to wear European clothes, without losing their national charm.”

In the second part of the magazine he showed me other “stars”: Nipponese in this case, dressed and made-up in imitation of White women. I admired them.

“The Japanese woman,” he summed up dogmatically, “perfects herself very soon in anything she undertakes.”

“I’ve danced our tangoes with your geisha,” I confirmed. “They dance just like Parisian women.”

He threw himself back and burst out laughing.

“Do you know? . . . At one time, in your French Indo-China, at Saigon, the houses of prostitution which the Whites frequented were staffed by Japanese women. . . .”

“So I’ve heard,” said I prudently.

“It’s quite true. But those houses don’t exist any longer. Our Consuls sent all the women home.”

“Yes, I rather gathered that they acted as a . . . as an information service for you out there.”

“And then we didn’t need them any more! . . . But haven’t we a right to our revenge?” said he, scratching his smooth cheek. “It ought to be our turn now . . . to take the women of your nations for our amusement. . . .”

"Some Japanese," I murmured, "are at least brokers in what is commonly called the White Slave Traffic."

"Yes, that's so, isn't it?" he cried in great delight. "In China you mean? But these White women aren't compelled. . . . It's of their own free will."

"Doubtless."

"They always hold us in the wrong, us Yellows, whenever there's any trouble about a White woman: especially in America. . . . And it's so often sheer lies! You must have heard about Mrs. Massie and the Chinese who were accused of raping her, in the Hawaiian Islands. It's said there was a Japanese, too. That's not possible, in my opinion."

"Yes, I'm hoping to document myself in Honolulu about that trial. It's attracted a lot of attention already. . . ."

"Then you'll see for yourself. Of course, the Americans detest us. You read their papers? They pretend that Japan wants to conquer everything—to dominate the Asiatic world, and then the whole world. Such childishness! . . . They say, in short, that we're engaged in a great plot to turn the typical Japanese into the Superman. . . . So then the Japanese woman would be the Superwoman—that goes without saying. . . ."

Somewhat dumbfounded, I stared at my table-companion. The saki was transforming this Americanised Yellow gentleman's face into a mask much more Old Japan. His mouth sneered. His eyes shrank to a mere oblique line.

"What a plot, my French friend! . . . Not merely conquest, but also suppression of that primacy theoretically bestowed upon your White race. . . . *Suppression of the White race itself*, by admixture, by cross-breeding. Not with the Japanese, of course. The Japanese would remain pure, quite pure, all by themselves. . . . But cross-breeding with the Chinese, with the Indo-Chinese, with the Blacks—*above all, with the Blacks*. . . ."

I said nothing. I was profoundly disturbed.

"That's what the Americans say. . . . No more White race. Japan over all. . . . Can you swallow that? Just what a child might imagine, eh? That would be, indeed, a Great Plot! . . ."

Then, gurgling with wild mirth, he lisped:

"But still . . . but still, what if it were true?"